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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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Pedagogue, Patriot, and Poet—*Cartoons by Natesan.*

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The Whispering Gallery of Life & Letters

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

> The truly great
> Have all one age, and from one visible place
> Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
> Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
> Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—
>
> COLERIDGE

> It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—
>
> WORDSWORTH

Nobel Prize for Literature

LUIGI PIRANDELLO, the Italian dramatist and novelist is the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature this year.

' Luigi Pirandello was born on June 28, 1867, on a country estate near Girgenti (Sicily). He first went to Rome at the age of nineteen, staying there until 1891 when he went to Germany and graduated in Philosophy at the University of Bonn. He subsequently returned to Rome and taught at the Girls' High School until 1923. His first literary essays were in verse . . . Another Sicilian writer, Luigi Capuana, persuaded him to devote himself to fiction, and in 1894 he published his first novel . . . in which his somewhat bitter realism already finds expression.' (Encyclopædia Brittannica). Pirandello's literary output amounts to a dozen volumes of short stories, as many dramas, and about half-a-dozen novels. Recently The Bodley Head published a selection of his short stories entitled "The Naked Truth," translated by Arthur and Henrie Mayne, and the English of the translation which laughs its laugh of admirable freedom has subtly caught in it the philosophic tone of the author: sympathy with life and a quiet harshness against self-deceit.

In 1920 Signor Pirandello said of his own art:

' I think that life is a very sad piece of buffoonery; because we have in ourselves, without being able to know why, wherefore or whence, the need to deceive ourselves constantly by creating a reality (one for each and never the same for all), which from time to time is discovered to be vain and illusory . . . My art is full of bitter compassion for all those who deceive themselves; but this compassion cannot fail to be followed by the ferocious derision of destiny which condemns man to deception.'

John Galsworthy

HIMSELF a no mean dramatist and story-teller Mr Hermon Ould's study of Galsworthy (Chapman and Hall Ltd., 8s. 6d.) justly and finely balances Galsworthy: the Man and Galsworthy: the Artist. 'Galsworthy,' he says, 'thirsted after beauty as the saint after righteousness'; his life was one untiring and undeviating quest after truth. 'He figured prominently,' writes Mr Ould in his foreword to the book, 'in so many worlds—the worlds of literature, the theatre, social service, international affairs—that studies from many angles will be required to produce a just picture of the complete man. The pages which follow are an attempt to give a purely personal appreciation, to record some of the details which went to the building up of Galsworthy as he exists in my mind. . . How much the picture I give will be derived from personal contact with him over half-a-score of years and how much to familiarity with his work spread over a much longer period, it is impossible to say. All I claim is that the picture is *my* picture, that I have not gleaned impressions and facts here and there among Galsworthy's friends and acquaintances, nor derived my opinion of his work from the usual critical sources.' Mr Ould, after making this frank and simple confession, enlarges the impressions and dilates upon the facts; and though in certain places his talk is a little bromidy the picture he has drawn is not a picture of pale colours; it is not a palimpsest; the brightness is lit from the inside and has the 'quick of the sun.' In discussing Galsworthy's sex-credo Mr Ould has ably answered Lawrence's vile attack on the subject of his study over this vital problem. A long quotation from "Over the River" sums up Galsworthy's last words on love, which in essence is: 'It had no shame, and owned no master; built homes and gutted them; passed by on the other side; and now and again made of two hearts one heart till death.'

An Autobiography

WHEN a woman is inclined to be personal she becomes more interesting than man; when she says that life is a thing *lived* if one has the courage and comedic spirit to face it she is not uttering a common place, she is saving God's blessing from being twisted into a curse. Mrs Burnett Smith who writes under the pen-name of Annie S. Swan is the author of many entertaining novels; *My Life* (Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 5s.), her autobiography, is as delightful as any of her novels; she speaks of her gentle mother, of her stern father to whom she owes her capacity for hard work, of her marriage, of early disappointments and encouragements about her work with grace and infinite candour. Conan Doyle, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Marie Corelli, and Mrs Oliphant are some of the many celebrities she met. Her war-time services in France and America reveal fully the sprit with which she faced life. The "testament of age," the concluding part of the book is a testament of light and beauty.

Novelist as Film Star

HUGH WALPOLE, the novelist, is to become a film actor. He has signed a contract to play the part of a clergyman in the screen version of "David Copperfield". Mr Walpole originally went to Hollywood to advise in the production of the picture.

CROWDED HOURS

By M. CHALAPATHI RAU

'I AM going to kill myself,' thought Sebastian.

The waiter bent like a mark of interrogation.

The Cafe de Orleans hummed like a bee-hive of beauties.

'Amstel Beer,' ordered Sebastian.

The cars came like an endless caravan, tooting endlessly, into the silent streets, into the endless sky, glaring with their dreamy phosphorescent eyes, booming with their monster-mouths; like a caravan they were coming without end.

'I will kill myself,' thought Sebastian.

The orchestra roared its Orphean melodies. The lax bodies became taut, tense. The blood creamed, foamed, and drummed. The legs stiffened and the fingers played; the arms tapered, wound round the throbbing backs, touched the trembling waists, capered and fingered; they danced. The orchestra was booming. The legs pattered on tip-toes, bodies rose and bent and answered the rising sound, answered the bell-like music in the blood, bending, floating forwards and backwards; faces smiling into faces, eyes looking dreamily into endless eyes, ears listening to endless melodies, all in a trance floating forwards and backwards. The shining athletic figures, with their diaphanous gowns, their flowerlike feet, all in a flutter, straining their necks like earthly nymphs, gleaming like water and glass, gossiping, laughing red laughter with their pearl-white teeth, rows of pearls and pearls, the Phidian shapes, with faces of Greek goddesses, round and oval faces, with alabaster arms, Psyche-breasts, languidly drooping and curving, and the legs piping music, pattering, tapping, pattering; like flowers that had grown up overnight, tulips and dalphiniums, laughing in the night, laughing at the moon, laughing at everything. The gowns flapped, rustled, and zithered; budded and flowered, furled and unfurled; the *crepe de Chine* and gold borders, magenta and ochre, the pink ones shining with red flowers, rustling and flapping; arms issuing out of bottomless depths, heads floating with their flowerlike hair, and necks, the gleaming swanlike necks, spreading into the gleaming chest and disappearing under, issuing out of the taut stockings, gleaming, pattering tapping; the flowerlike ladies with their flowerlike hair and their flowerlike feet, dalphiniums and tulips and lilies giggled and laughed.

They are made of rainbows, these ladies, with their gleaming swannecks, with their transparent hues, laughing like angels, dancing like daffodils, or some woodland birds or flowers, moving about like faces on a fresco; they are not ladies; they are not of flesh and bone; their raiment is of dreams; they are made of rainbows.

Time dragged on its unending tail, too slowly for Sebastian. He could not understand the secret of their song, the magic in their blood, that made their flesh bloom and die, wither and spring up; his flesh felt kinship with their flesh; his eyes were lost in their frizzles. They enamoured him with their moth-like feet, the butterfly brilliance of their eyes, and their laughter, the hollow laughter, the laughter of the hollow years, the laughter flowing hollowly from hollow mouths.

They enjoyed life; for them life was real, life was beautiful; they were not dreaming; they were revelling in their blood, rubbing it into ecstasy; enjoying life, not dreaming about it. For us life is too good, too sweet, it is a dream; or life is too dull, too ugly, and we must have a consolation, a philosophy to escape from its terrors, its Medusa-splendour; it is not real as it is real to them;

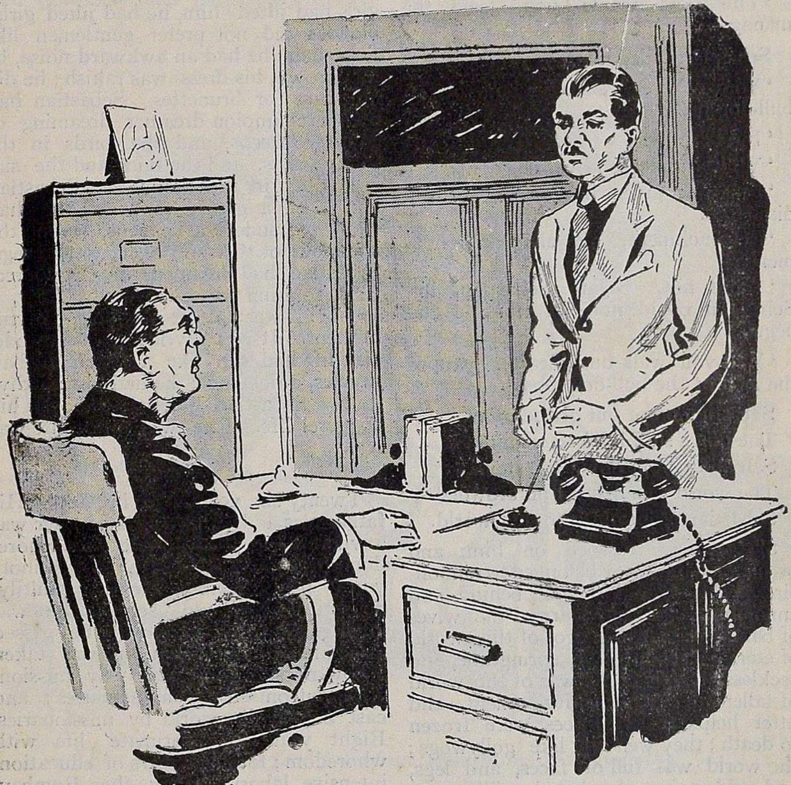
it is not beautiful as it is beautiful to them.

'I am going to drown myself,' Sebastian murmured a good-bye to life.

The orchestra stopped booming; and the bodies unbent, and the lyrical legs became lax, the arms fell apart, the fingers ceased fiddling, the flowerlike stumps of beauty which could not move, or totems of divinity which were desecrated; the half-naked bodies hinting at their nakedness, half-nakedness filling the air with its rumours.

*

Dawn had sat like a pre-historic bird over the tops of Bombay. But the



'*Retrenchment, old chap, retrenchment.*'

faces opened out of mystery; they laughed, they talked, they giggled; life was beautiful, life was real. They were tired and lapsed into silence; only the eyes languidly peering out of ennui into the smoky silence like lozenges. Faces surged in the smoky light; they lay like morning burst into Titian-splendour; it shone and scorched; it overflowed. The city, which had slept its catlike sleep in the night, rose like a dragon breathing fire and smoke. Mills opened their Cerberus mouths and howled. Brobdingnagian buses snorted, shook,

and blundered about ominously. Trams started lazily and tramped away like Leviathans.

At ten, Sebastian came out of the Indo-Portuguese Hotel at the corner of the Tegart Road, and walked towards the Esplanade He walked into the office of Dunkerley & Co.

'The boss wants you,' said the manager.

Sebastian sailed into the office.

'You are fired,' said the boss of the bull-dog breed.

'But !'

'Will you please leave the room ?'

'I may be given the reason for my discharge.'

'Retrenchment, old chap, retrenchment.'

'I did not,' began Sebastian, but Sebastian could not end what he had begun.

'Will you walk out, please ?' yapped the man of the bull-dog breed.

Sebastian crept out of the room.

The office staff blinked at him.

Sebastian crept down the stairs.

The world was dusty and crowded.

Sebastian crept out into the world.

Skyscrapers frowned on him and proclaimed that they belonged to millionaires. Big cars honked behind and announced that they carried the wives of baronets. He was not of this world of eternal enchantment, springtime, and reckless dreaming ; he was of the world of fallen angels, of disillusionment, and utter helplessness. Faces were frozen to death ; they went by like gollywogs ; the world was full of faces, and legs, and wild noises ; he hated millionaires and baronets. His head floated in a medley of noises and dreams.

Sebastian chewed and spat out the past. The future shone like a big blur.

He went back to the Indo-Portuguese Hotel at the corner of the Tegart Road ; he laid himself on his bed. The future shone like a big blur.

Life was bitter. He poetized. Life was a bitter pill, not coated with sugar. Sebastian was a poet. He had written magniloquent sonnets on love and life and death ; but he had a weak memory and forgotten them ; he could only remember that Life was a bitter pill, that it had more of sound in it than sense. He had loved too, loved ardently; girls had jilted him, he had jilted girls ; blondes did not prefer gentlemen like Sebastian ; he had an awkward noise, he was brown, his dress was rakish ; he did not care for brunettes. Sebastian had been a champion dreamer dreaming of country greens, and the birds in the shaky nests, and the rain, and the sun struggling in the branches. Sebastian had been a great wanderer ; he had wandered under the heavens, beyond the stars, out of the sight of faces and legs. Sebastian had dreamed and wandered. Life to him was a dream, a song, a sonata ; it was a drag, a trouble, a divine torment. It was a lyric ; it was an ode. His life had run like a patch of bad rhymes, a doggerel ; he had lost all rhythm. Sebastian poetized about his doggerel life. Life was bitter, life was real.

Twenty-six years ago in Goa. His father was a drunkard ; his mother was a whore. He was intimate with whoredom for eight long years ; the unholy years passed away slowly, guiltily. Sebastian went to school ; he was intelligent, he was studious ; he passed his examinations. Then he was taken up by missionaries, petted by missionaries, patronised by missionaries ; and cast out in the world by missionaries. Eight years of intimate life with whoredom ; fourteen years of education, intensive, laborious, long ; then Bombay, three more years of super-tramping, brothels, hockey matches, days brimming with dreams, and sleepless nights. His father had stopped sending him money ; his mother had forgotten him ; he was resurrected in a new world. Dunkerley & Co. took him up ; for one year he toiled dreamily before undreaming desks ; and hockey matches and brothels.

Now the future was a big blur.

At 2. 30. in the afternoon Sebastian crept out into a sultry world. His dress was shabby—it was creased; his hat was tilted oblivious of the world. He crept into the talkie house, and sat between two scented ladies, one fat, the other lean. Millionaires came in with their pot-bellies and half-naked wives; they occupied the boxes; they shook their Midas' ears.

The lights went out. Mickey Mouse came and flicked its tail; Ramsay Mac Donald purred on international politics; 'planes rushing up the sky; Chinese warlords; motorcycle races; Hawaiian melodies. The lights were on.

The fat lady giggled; the lean lady expanded.

The lights went out.

Sebastian felt the fat lady; she was volatile. The lean lady was quiet. They were in the thick of the plot. Some Garbo-like thing lay panting in the arms of a sensualist he-man. The soprano then fluttered under moonlit skies; the baritone he-man pumped out all the music that was in him; the soprano sobbed, he hovered about her; she panted, he kissed her; she lay hushed, he relented under the moonlit skies.

Sebastian could not bear the heat and the fat lady. He could not bear his thoughts. He crept out. He spent an hour in a cafe.

The evening was too Whistlerian for words. It must be described in

'She smiled with a face full of understanding and sympathy.'

daubs of paint. It was blue, red, and yellow.

Sebastian went to the *maidan* and saw boys play hockey and cricket. He crept into the tram and travelled long distances. The roads roared their records of Gargantuan music. Advertisements of druggists,' chemists,' and dentists' shops passed like posters in heaven. The sky was drifting. Everything was shaky. Beauty passed by him staring; he saw beauties without breasts, beauties in pomade, beauties mounted on monumental bottoms, moth-like beauties with marmoreal faces, breasts glittering under glamorous silks, beauties with tusks and Epstein busts. Sebastian was bored.

He walked about listlessly. He was bored by the beauties of skyscrapers, the endless rattle of life, the highbrow beauties.

Bombay is a cubist picture painted by Picasso. It is a crossword puzzle filled with El Greco figures. It is incoherent, fantastic. The architecture belongs to different styles, different countries, different nations; it defies trigonometry and laughs at life. Men and women move like dolls in a pantomime. Humanity lies huddled up and put in holes. There is one long street, a street without end; herein houses stew and steam and loom black as Gehenna. They are brothels and cafes. Sebastian crept into a brothel.

Sebastian lived for two hours in Purgatory.

The light burned dimly in the darkness. Sebastian rose up gathering her dresses. She smiled with a face full of understanding and sympathy. She brought him a drink which he gulped down, looked vacant, swam up to consciousness and slipped back into emptiness again. The flesh stood on tiptoes, weak and eager; he smelt of bitter flowers in her blood, hollowness in the core of her being.

She sat like a saint in her hovel. Sebastian returned to Inferno.

Sebastian moved among the faces. His head was among the stars. His feet stopped at the Cafe de Orleans. His dress was shabby; he was of mixed blood; his flesh was stranger to their flesh; but he could drink and look on. The cabaret and cocktail dance were meant for the purest blood.

'Amstel Beer!'

The waiter brought a glass.

The dance was on again. The totems woke to life; the stumps of beauty rose in the light. The orchestra boomed; legs became lyrical; fingers faltered; and midriffs throbbed and floated; the laughter flowing hollowly from hollow mouths. One lady more beautiful than the rest laughed suddenly like a gypsy in a twilight, lifted her frizzles over her elfin ears, laughed like a gypsy. They were not women of flesh and blood; they were voices and giggling feet; they were laughter, the laughter of the wind in the reeds, the laughter of the waves on the shore; they were Japanese dolls come to life; they were languid fairies who had forgoten their bodies. They were just floating about like the wind in the reeds, like the waves upon the shore, in and out like Japanese dolls.

'I am going to drown myself,' Sebastian stifled a prayer.

Sebastian was getting drunk. He gulped down another bottle and had a glorious vision of hell-fire and worms that never died.

He crept out. His bewildered body crept on with faltering feet. He looked upon the star-haunted sky. His head moved among the stars. He passed through street after street. He listened to the silence, the sparkling silence of the stars, the livid silence of the sky, the silence of the trees, the silence of the roads. He listened to the silence within himself.

The moon lay molten on the far horizon.

It seemed Mephistopheles was walking with cap in hand.

Sebastian saw the sea and its soulless symmetry, listening to its own incantation. It lay heavy with tired eyelids; the sky was black covered with stars, haunted by invisible gods.

Sebastian quivered. It seemed the Devil himself was conspiring with the

'I am not going to kill myself,' thought Sebastian.

deep sea. The sea was a bore; it seemed to waver, it seemed to vanish, to doubt. It was poised on the horns of a dilemma.

And the moon lay molten on the far horizon.

The beach at Juhu, thought Sebastian, was better for ending his life. It was too serene for the Devil. The sea at Juhu mixed with the feet and laughter of girls. It did not waver, it did not doubt, it was human.

Sebastian doubted. The night shuffled her blue dresses and dipped her feet in the waters, drawing up her skirts, causing a rippling of winds and a rushing of water, and walked away shuffling her blue dresses. The waters came and stopped, went back, came rushing and stopped; giggled and danced; life for them too was beautiful, life was real.

Sebastian stood remembering days and nights, exciting moments of adventures, rose-coloured dawns, dim translucent twilights, watery skies, murky moons, days of studying with midnight oil, and O, the endless hours of toil and the papers announcing the results! He thought of God and the Higher Whoredom.

The world was tottering on its haunches, and the sea was tottering.

Sebastian retraced his steps. The night lay like a monster wallowing in darkness. And the moon lay molten in the far horizon.

Sebastian crept back into the Cafe de Orleans. The dance was ending. The voices mixed in a riot of warmth and fading colour. The dresses were fantastically frizzeld; the legs were tired and the fingers lay limp; the faces lay like faded flowers as though they were disenchanted. They went again into their balloons of flesh and blood, and descended to the earth, now laughing louder.

The waiter bent like a mark of interrogation.

' Amstel Beer,' said Sebastian.

The motor cars were tooting endlessly; into the silent streets, into the endless sky; glaring with their phosphorescent eyes, barking with their monstrous mouths; like a caravan they were going without end.

'I am not going to kill myself,' thought Sebastian.

And the moon had faded on the far horizon.

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burn'd on the water ; the poop was beaten gold ;
Purple the sails, and so perfum'd, that
The winds were love-sick with them ; the oars were silver ;
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat, to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description ; she did lie
In her pavilion (cloth of gold of tissue),
O'er-picturing that Venus, where we see
The fancy outwork nature ; on each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid, did.

SHAKESPEARE
(*Antony and Cleopatra*)

JUSTICE

By "E"

ON the basement of the Ripon statue he slept, a boy barely fourteen. His loin-cloth which was a piece of discarded gunny had fallen away ; he seemed part of that beautiful black sculpture. And in his nakedness he slept uuconscious that the sun was laughing upon him. The sun had laughed upon others like him in other continents ; he was never tired of his laughter, he was born to laugh.

Around him life and light grew loud. He did not stir ; he still belonged to the night and was bound up in its miracle.

The servant of the Corporation came with his watering-pot to spray the bed of grass at the foot of the statue. Seeing the sleeping waif he addressed him foully, in words that smelt of the slums, kicking on his buttocks to harmonise the words, and when he found that they had little effect in waking him, turned up his face with a sudden twist and directed the perforated nozzle of the watering-pot on it. The boy sat up blinking ; the water continued to dart on his face, cold and shrill as needles ; lifting shielding palms he rose up, and gathering his gunny cloth bounded over the chain-fence and scampered to the sidewalk on the left of the road.

Wiping the water off his body he stood panting. The sun laughed his scorching summer laugh, entered the waif's stomach, and lay there like electric coils.

He begged of the passers by in the name of god for a pie ; but the world of purses was empty of pies as were the temples of gods. He hung about restaurants looking wistfully at those coming out beaming and belching ; his extended hand grew cramped for all its extending.

Hunger crumpled him down on the pavement. It fell from the air and sanded his throat. It rose from the earth and blurred his eyes. But he sat on.

Presently a man passed him drawing a cartload of ripe plantains. He tottered upon his legs, and with what little strength was left in him, rushed up to the receding cart and snatched half-a-dozen of the fruits. He thrust one greedily, skin and all into his mouth but something like a vice round his neck held him back from eating. A couple of minutes and it relaxed ; he then felt a heavy clout on his head which stunned him for a while; then looking up he saw a burly mohammedan staring bloody-eyed at him.

'You thief,' thundered he, accompanying it with another clout on the head, 'walk to the tana. You've indeed a good appetite for my plantains.'

He was mute with misery. It seemed to him that he was the only waif in the world. Nobody came to his rescue. He wanted to run but his enemy had read the weak intention in his eyes and held him fast. And with the fruits in his hands he marched him to the nearest police station.

The sub-inspector of that division was a young man who had just then finished his probation and entered duty as an officer. He was eager to work; wanted to keep his crowned buttons bright and his red, laced turban free of dust.

Solemnly he heard the account of the theft, hedged by the constables who looked at their truncheons on the wall and then looked at the boy, and solmnly he charge-sheeted the culprit.

*

The magistrate sat yawning through-out the hearing of the case. The prose-

cuting sub-inspector of police was brilliant in his arguments ; his summing up was a little gem in the study of the psychology of criminals ; he termed the young offender a " budding criminal " and fought for his conviction. P. C. 3245 had identified him as the urchin who just a week ago, picked the pocket of an old gentleman who was shopping in the Moore market ; P. C. 3259 had actually seen the fellow prowling about with a cycle lamp and had given chase but he had slipped him ; he was the most dangerous of dodgers and head of a band of young pickpockets in the city.

The magistrate looked at the trembling offender in the dock.

He shuffled the papers and twirled the steelpen between his fingers. His magisterial eyes had no light in them to know the beauty of apealing boyhood before him. It trembled on the face, a wild wet flower that the dark hour of a rural dawn had given birth. No clod of the urban mud clung to it.

The magistrate looked on utterly expressionless at the quiet inquisition of those bright boyish eyes. He had looked only into the eyes of men and women ; he had no children.

' Three years in the Borstal School,' he pronounced pompously. It was a triumph for the whole magistracy.

But in the radiant horizon a cloudlet floating from somewhere had left a redstain on its radiance.

THE ELECTRIC LIGHT IN ITS INFANCY

I heard a woman in a bus boring her lover about the electric light. She wanted to know this and that and the poor lover was helpless. Then she said she wanted to know how it was regulated. At last she settled down by saying that she knew it was in its infancy. The word " infancy " seemed to have a soothing effect upon her for she said no more, but leaning her head against her lover's shoulder, composed herself to slumber.

SAMUEL BUTER
(*Written Sketches*)

THE END OF A FEUD

By P. S. NATARAJA SARMA

PALU THEVAN rushed into his hut, breathless. He found his wife standing in the yard staring wildly at something ahead of her.

'Look at those flames. How they leap! It is Kariyan's hayrick,' she shouted from outside as she caught sight of his turban at the back-door.

Palu Thevan went outside to have a look. Kariyanna Thevan's haystack was burning fiendishly, fanned by a mild breeze. It was a dark night, still and starless. The breath of the dry, unbroken earth was on the air. The handful of *marava* huts that lay scattered over the moorland crouched like shadows. The horizon was a line of scraggy hills. It was at the foot of these hills that Kariyan lived. His haystack was on fire. The flames shot out in all directions, curled and danced with a ghostly swish, enveloping the hills behind in a pallid glare.

Karuppaki watched the fire with her heart in her mouth. She was moved visibly as she thought of the destruction it was working.

'The curse of the *Mariammán* on the evil one who did it,' she said, feeling righteously indignant, though she knew full well that Palu Thevan was no friend of Kariyan's.

Palu Thevan laughed.

'He found his wife staring wildly at something ahead of her.'

'Ah, you are calling a curse on your own head, dear wife.'

'Was it you that did it, then?'

'Well, well, Kariyan is not an angel. You know that. He called me a fool, a son of a dog, that day at the village fair. And he abused you too, dear one. You remember that. He is paying for his

abuses, ha! ha! ha! Son of a dog indeed!'

Palu Thevan looked vicious, fierce as he said all that. It was the world-old story of a family feud among the *maravas*. From time immemorial, the two families had flown at each other's throat. Kariyan's ancestors had killed Palu Thevan's ancestors or put lucifers in their hayricks, and Palu Thevan's ancestors had paid them back in the same coin. Palu Thevan was not the man to go against the family tradition. Wherever there was a drop of the Kariyan blood to be shed safely, or a hayrick to be burnt without the law interfering, he spared no pains to do it. He looked at his little piece of devilry to-night as a bit of heroism, a march stolen over Kariyan's depradations.

He explained the details to his wife. He had implicit confidence in her. He always shared his secrets with her. She was not the kind of woman to betray his trust. More than once she had proved her mettle. And then, too, Karuppaki had brains, whereas he had little; she could *think* and her counsel had got him unscratched out of many an ugly scrape.

'But, bless us!' she exclaimed as he finished his narration, 'you might be caught. Kariyan will come to know and he might retaliate. Or the police might get at you'.

'Be quiet, little one,' Palu Thevan answered complacently, 'nobody will ever know.'

Palu Thevan went out into the night in search of good toddy, his little wisdom eaten up in much confidence. But Karuppaki thought better of the situation.

*

The next morning, half-a-dozen stout *maravas* squatted under the margosa tree outside Kariyan's hut. They were having a kind of palaver. They looked grim, all of them. But the grimmest was Kariyan. He was a short, thickest man with a charcoal complexion, a hideous moustache and a pair of copper-red eyes that bulged enormously out of their sockets due to constant drinking.

'He shall rue it,' he said vehemently, striking his clenched right fist on the palm of his left hand. 'I shall pluck the heart out of the fellow and make his wife a widow. Or my name is not Kariyanna Thevan.'

His audience was silent. Only one of the older fellows—and one given to frequent contradicting—murmured half-distinctly:

'Suppose it is not he after all.'

Kariyan made a gesture of impatience. 'As if I do not know. I could swear by the *Mariamman* it was Palu Thevan and no other.'

They fell to discussing how best to wreak vengeance on the rick-burner. They had had an overdose of the palmyra-juice in the morning and could think but feebly. There was, consequently, a lot of quarrelling and dissenting. All were agreed on one point: that Palu Thevan should be killed outright. A unanimous decision on the method of killing seemed far off, when they were interrupted by someone walking into their midst.

And then they had the surprise of their lives. For it was Karuppaki. She approached them calm and unperturbed. She was dressed in a new *chelai* that was all flounces and red and black and green. Her hair was combed down with a liberal application of oil and she had stuck a saffron patch on her forehead. All eyes turned on her together as if worked by a switch, some in admiration, others with dark suspicion.

Karuppaki lifted her head coolly towards Kariyan. She was deemed a beauty among the *maravas* of Vallanjeri and she was conscious of it. Kariyan was too astonished to feel anything; he had a weakness for women, and Karuppaki, in particular, had a way of making him feel awkward.

'*Aiyah*,' she said a little confused, 'we, or rather I, heard about that fire. And I am sorry for you. The *Mariamman's* curse shall light on the blackguard who did the evil deed.'

'Let us have plain talking, *amma*,' Kariyan answered a trifle ironically (his loss was too green in his memory, woman or no woman), 'we know who did it.' And he laughed a laugh that meant daggers.

'Who is it?'

'Palu Thevan, your husband. Why do you affect innocence? I will——'

'Ah, I knew you would say so. You are mistaken,' she said piteously. 'Poor man, he is away in the town now. He left last morning. He has gone to get things, you know. He is going to Palani,' and she broke off and smiled broadly, 'that was what I came here for. It will be many a long day before he comes back home after crossing the rivers and climbing the hills. They say Palani is far away, somewhere in the north country, and there are tigers and leopards on the way. God knows what will become of my man. We are having a little feast this evening. I came to ask you to it.'

She extended her hand in gracious invitation. They did not see that the hand was trembling. She was playing her trump card. The issue was to decide the fate of her husband. And she waited anxiously.

The trick worked. Her guileless aspect and ingenuous smile gave the lie a cloak of naturalness and softened the hot *marava* blood. There was a general grunt, and a movement of uneasy approbation.

She was quick to follow up her success. 'My husband is away, you know, or he would have come to invite you himself. He will be here before supper-time. I am alone and there is plenty of work to do. You must help me. Come.'

*

Palu Tuevan loitered about, immensely pleased with his beastly work and blissfully ignorant of the game that was being played behind his back. He felt that it was the greatest thing he had as yet done in his life. He celebrated the achievement with a visit to the pot-house. He had an initial mug of toddy, then a second, a third and so on until he was dead drunk. Saturated with the liquor, he staggered to a bed inside the toddy-shop and slept for twelve hours.

It was nearing nightfall when he returned to his hut, his balance restored somewhat and his vision freed from a legion of distressing illusions. A strange scene awaited him inside his hut. A score or more of *maravas* sat round a big *chatti*, laughing and humming, chatting and chewing. There were young men and old, friends as well as enemies.

Palu Thevan strained his eyes in the direction of the motley assemblage. In the pale light of the earthen lamp that burned in their midst, he recognized the burly dimensions of Kariyan, with his copper-red eyes and frightful moustache, as he leant forward to crack a vulgar joke.

Palu Thevan shrank back instinctively, petrified. He was amazed, angered, maddened, by turns. Vaguely and in spite of a heavy overdose of toddy, he seemed to grasp the meaning of the gathering. Then something happened to confirm his suspicion. As he stood watching the group from under the little mango in his lawn, he was aware of a female figure advancing towards them with a broad smile, holding a tray of betels in her hand.

His heart sank within him. Of a sudden he felt as if he had lost something. Then a madness seized him—a turbulent thrist for blood. A wicked plan shapened in his mind, clear and definite. Without caring to waste a second thought, treading as softly as his hateful passion or his quivering legs could allow him, he sought the back-door of his hut.

He met his wife in the kitchen. Simultaneously his iron grip fell upon her wrist and cracked the glass bangles. She was dismayed, but her eyes remained fixed, unmoved and immovable.

'Liar! wretch! daughter of the devil! . . . you have betrayed me!'

His voice choked with hate and fury, he could not articulate another word.

She did not move, she did not budge. She knew it was no use remonstrating.

Instinctively she recognized the darkness that was swooping down on her. She bowed to the inevitable.

Her eyes stared glassily at her husband, until he could bear them no longer. He felt his resolution would stagger if he gazed at her for one more minute.

His hands circled round her neck and tightened unerring. Hatefully . . . madly . . . fiendishly . . . desperately. A grasp . . . an unearthly groan, the thin neck felt cold, the glassy eyes looked glassier . . . she fell back limp.

plucking him back already, and he could do little damage.

Kariyan laughed a laugh that rang through the little hut.

'Serves him right,' he bellowed, his innate hatred for the murder awakened, all the keener because of his pity for the murdered. 'You were not worthy of her, man. She tried to save you, you have murdered her for it. The *Mariamman's* curse has lighted on you,' he continued rising to a really romantic height and looking at his comrades for approval. 'She said it would.'

'His hands circled round her neck and tightened unerring.'

The next instant, two-and-twenty stalwart men had cordoned round Palu Thevan, and from all of them, the cry arose as one shriek:

'Murder!'

Palu Thevan heard it but partly. In spite of the pressing number around him, inspite of the maniacal thoughts that ran riot within him, his murderous gaze fell upon Kariyan. With diabolic swiftness he rushed upon his enemy of all time and aimed a brutal blow at his chest. But strong hands had been

In parts and parcels, and with a generous display of feeling, they explained to him the whole story. He heard it in silence. He was strangely tame when they had finished.

'Do whatever you like with me. Take me to the police or dash my brains out. I don't mind.'

With half-a-dozen simultaneous offences to his credit, the fellow was hanged the other day, 'by the neck till he was dead.' He didn't mind.

BREAKING THE ROD

By AUNDY

I

MY father had acquired at his superannuation an unimaginative regularity in his meals and lunch, and woe be to the cook, Subbaroyan Poti, if he brought the afternoon tea five minutes earlier or later than the prescribed hour. And on the day before my cousin Sundaram's nuptials he had to leave our guests to themselves in my apartment to give the unfortunate Poti a bit of his greatly angered mind. This opportunity was availed of by the visitors to have the following intimate conversation.

'Well, what does my Sarada want?' began Collector Visvanatha Sarma turning to his daughter.

'Create a scene on the eve of your nuptials, girl?' interposed his widowed sister, Ponnamma.

'When am I to lodge my protest, aunt,' replied Sarada, 'if I miss it to-day? On my *seemantam* day?'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Ponna. 'Why should you protest at all?'

'Why didn't you inform your father before you started from Madras last week?' put in Sankaran, the purohit son of Ponnamma.

'Whoever dreamt of this then,' replied Sarada. 'It was but a lucky chance that disclosed to me to-day this rake's—'

'Dear me!' ejaculated the aunt. 'This about your husband, girl?' She stressed the word of sacred relationship.

'May be, but that doesn't make him a saint.'

'Come, come, Sarada,' began the collector persuasively, 'sit down and tell me all about it. A brave, upright girl like you needn't have secrets, I suppose.'

'No secrets, father dear. He gave me this book (showing a book she had in her hands) yesterday evening to read. I turned over a few pages before going to sleep and found a slip of paper inside it. It was the record of the authorities of a London hospital where he had been an in-patient in the special ward. He himself has confessed in writing that his ailment was the direct result of a "slight conjugal inadvertency.". But what was worse,—on the back of that clinical record was written in his own hand—'

'Yes, go on, Sarada,' the Collector encouraged his hesitating daughter.

'In memory of Lilian Cooper and dedicated to her Indian double, Thangam,' continued Sarada. I didn't utter a word about it to anyone till this afternoon—when he brought this latter idol of his here.'

'Here?' echoed all the other three simultaneously.

'Yes, here. He introduced her to me as Miss Thangam, a *vina* tutor, whom he was engaging to give me lessons.'

'Is that all?' sneered the purohit, relieved evidently by the apparent silliness, as he thought, of Sarada's plea. 'I had almost thought that something serious had happened. However clever a harlot might be in seducing Sundaram in your absence, it must be absurdly simple for you to reform him.'

'Is marital life a reformatory?' interrogated Sarada.

'Yes, it is,' answered the purohit.

'But it is waste of time trying to reform a man,' said she.

'Why?'

'Because men resemble certain fish. Anything fleshy will act as a bait, and I can't be flirting in an eternal coat of phosphorous over me to retain the affections of the man whom I have married.'

'But isn't it your duty?'

'Duty? Had I behaved as he did,

would he have looked calmly at such a duty ?'

'Such a behaviour would be an insult and disgrace to your husband.'

'So it is for me to have a husband like *that* ?'

'No, a man's standard of morality is different from a woman's,' persisted the purohit.

'But who has accepted such a standard ?'

'Society, of course.'

'No, never. Don't confuse masculine lewdness with Society, please !'

'Do you want then to inflict an eternal punishment on him for a passing act of irregularity ?'

'Has he committed murder, girl,' interposed aunt Ponna, 'or ruined a family ?'

'Worse than both, aunt,' cried Sarada in indignation. 'Many a man owes life-long and agonising infirmity not to a prolonged course of vice but to an isolated act of irregularity. Many a wife infected by such a husband has languished for years with shattered health and ailments unmentionable. What of the great army of children born blind or deformed, incarnations of the sin of their fathers?'

'Well, Sarada,' put in the purohit, now humbled down by the rationality and untutored eloquence of the young lady, 'I begin to think that you are making a mountain of a mole hill. The matter is, after all nothing,-less than nothing.'

'Yes,' agreed the impatient aunt, making a pillar of a broken reed!'

'No, aunt, it is a serious thing,' asserted Sarada. Obviously both of you do not quite understand its seriousness. Though the medical expert has saved him from death, his children will bear the mark of his sin on their persons. Is he, therefore, the man, whom I shall feel justified in having made the father of my children ? I am aware of the agonies suffered by women forced into marriages against which their very flesh and blood cried out ?'

'Your father gave you this medical education,' argued Ponna, 'not very usual among brahmins, and you are using it thus, girl —to kick off your husband.'

'The future womanhood of our community will adore you indeed,' the purohit pricked in sarcastic complacence.'

'My father could have very well kept me in blissful ignorance and used me as the unconscious soil for the propagation of congenital maniacs,' retorted Sarada. 'I admit that elders have the right to dissuade youth from one undesirable alliance, but they have never that of compelling it into another.'

The dialogue would have gone on with greater heat had not my father made his abrupt entry, announcing lunch and ordering an immediate adjournment to the hall.

'Excuse me, uncle,' said Sarada, 'I've had my lunch just now in the kitchen. Your funny cook, Subbaroyan, gave me a very nice dish of what he called *sojjee*.'

'That's right,' said the collector, rising to move. 'Come on, Ponna and Sankaran?'

II

Collector Visvanatha Sarma was my maternal uncle. My father and he were great chums and they continued to be so even after my mother's death. His daughter, Sarada, was offered to me in marriage five years ago, but as it was made more in consideration of my father's money and his high position in life than for my intrinsic worth I had to decline it. It was too late when I heard that the girl herself who was a medical student at Madras had something to do with the choice; my first cousin Sundaram who was a graduate immediately applied for and was the recipient of the accomplished young lady. He was sent to England after marriage to compete for the Civil Service Examination. In spite of the best coaching he had had in London for a year, he was too much of the earth earthy to become one of the heavenborn ; he shoved himself into the Inner Temple. Dinners and dances, interspersed with occasional experiences of London hospitals made him a thoroughbred barrister-at-law in four years. It was only a year since he had returned

from the sceptred isle and set up practice, after much thinking, at Trivandrum.

His nuptials which continued to be kept in abeyance for a year or so after his return from abroad was announced. His wife's career as a medical student had ended. The bride's party which included the collector, his sister, and her purohit son arrived from Madras two days earlier and were lodged in my house. My father was fully absorbed in attending to the comforts of the Collector and our cook, Subbaroyan Poti, had the charge of his sister and her son while I was held up for hours together by the almost inexhaustible voracity of the young lady for literature art, and sociology. In fact, she had exhausted the whole of my little library of drama and dramatic criticism in a couple of days and was beaming with new ideas to be communicated to me.

When she was left alone in my room to reflect upon the next day's proceedings, her eyes looking vacantly at a bromide enlargement of my bust on the wall, the chatty cook Subbaroyan broke in, huskily shouting, 'Bicha Sami! Bicha sami!'

Pichu and Pichandy are two of my pet names with which I had been baptized in the cradle by my grandmother, Nagam Patti, who knew very well the efficacy of such talismanic appellations as Vembu, Aundy, Kuppu, and Pichu in combating infantile mortality. And it must be said to her credit that I am the sole survivor of my father's eleven children by his three consecutive wives, none of whom, alas, being alive now to appreciate the sagacity of Nagam Patti.

'Bicha sami not here, Doctor Mistress?' enquired the funny cook as he entered. 'Collegettor Sami hasked Botti where Bicha Sami is.'

'I do not know,' replied Sarada.

'Halways at 'ome, but to-day, no. Goberment service not want, goffee don't drinks, Bansuvari not chews, mull mull not wears, Gandi clos likes bery much, marriage not likes, Doctor Mistress's hand not took six years ago, now repents. But I goes back to the hall!'

The above is but an imaginary summary of the report I subsequently received from Sarada herself, and as such it must necessarily be bereft of most of his juicy and penetrating psychological reflections on myself, especially those that do not go to my credit.

III

I had not told anyone till then about my decision to marry the widow, Kamala. Her father was informed of this a day prior to the happenings narrated above. Although she declined my hand when it was offered to her in defiance of law and convention, during the lifetime of her epileptic husband, I did not choose to retaliate when the offer came from herself now. Her unhappy married life and her intense admiration for my artisitic and literary talents kept up my sympathies toward her, and the glamour of a widow-marriage in a state unused to it naturally fixed me up to the contract. It was to settle the day on which we three should start to Madras to register the marriage that I had gone to Kamala's house when Sarada was left in my room contemplating my bust on the wall.

I had finished the business in about half-an-hour and stepped in on my way to cousin Sundaram's to see what arrangements were in progress for the next day's ceremony. But Sundaram himself met me at the threshold and dragged me by the arm to go to my room to have a "nice sight," as he said, at his Sarada.

On the way we fell into a discussion about Hinduism, its flexibility, and its tolerance.

'It is a disgrace to our religion', I began, entering my room with Sundaram, but seeing Sarada there, I apologised to her, breaking off my statement, for my intrusion and proceeded to go out.

'Never mind me, I'll go,' said she, rising to leave. 'Wait, Sarada,' protested Sundaram, blocking her exit, 'this

discussion may interest you too. And more than all, I've come here for the pleasure of your sweet company.'

Sarada was thus compelled to watch the discussion. At first she did not take an active part in it, did not feel inclined to; she was in a state of self-critical subconsciousness; but when the arguments became heated, religion was enthroned on a dunghill crowned with a leaf-cap and sceptred with a broom, marriage was mocked and sacred ties cut, her young blood warmed up, her compressed lips began to quiver.

'Polygamy is not after all, a great sin,' threw out Sundram feeling wise and proud of his words.

'And polyandry?' butted in Sarada, unable to hold herself any more, and with a sarcastic wink at me.

'Hear! hear!' I could not control my laughter.

Sundaram was upset and he cried, 'This is impertinence!'

'Impertinence?' I repeated interrogatively.

'Yes.'

'That's an impudent remark,' I retorted.

'Leave us alone please for a while, brother Pichu,' interposed Sarada, coming up between me and her husband.

'Stupid!' I almost spat the word at him and left the room. I could however hear their words ringing inside.

'You should be whipped for this,' said he turning to the lady.

'Whip me then,' she challenged, 'that'll be a very nice business for an unemployed coward.'

'Is this the sort of love that you were supposed to be nourishing for your husband so long?'

'Love? Rot! Do you take me to be sentimental, sir?'

'Is love but a sentiment, madam?'

'Yes, and therefore a myth. Sex alone is reality.'

'Shame!'

'Not so much as running after—'

'What do you mean?'

'Love passed into the house of lust,' she sang a famous line.

'Do you approve of the insult of that opinionated egomaniac?'

'Do you refer to the English or the Indian strumpet?'

'Impertinent conjecture again?'

'But the records of the London hospital leave nothing to conjecture or impertinence?'

'I see. The fellow has been playing a nasty game, eh,? You are jealous.'

'Jealous! Pooh! Don't blame others for your sin against humanity, please.'

'Shut up and try to be more serious.'

'Yes, I am, and will go farther still. I refuse to consummate my marriage with you. Keep, therefore, your distance.'

'What! In your senses or moonstruck?'

'The lunar or the lunatic influence it is that I have resolved to prevent being transmitted to the children to be born of my womb, whose father you have become unfit to be.'

'I've a legal right over you. You forget that, woman.'

'You may test the strength of your law on my will if you want.'

'Have you an atom of anyone of the four feminine qualities of fear, innocence, modesty, and reserve?'

'Why can't these four words twine into a string to strangle the immoral courage of your masculine conceit?'

'I'll break your jaw for that.'

'A splendid short-cut that, for international notoriety. But you forget, sir, that any woman could be stronger than a bully.'

'What!' Sundaram advanced to strike Sarada on her cheek.

Swift as thought she lifted her left hand and gripped firmly Sundaram's right. 'Step back,' cried she following her words with a push which made him almost fall flat on his back.

Kitchen-broom is at least a weapon possessing the dignity of being dealt with by High Court Judges but a wife's

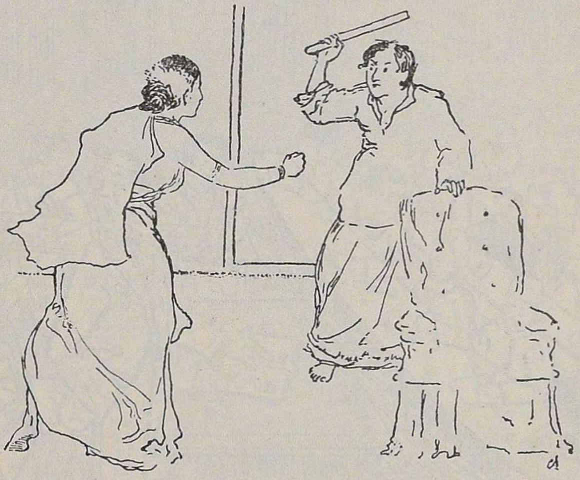
bare left hand was too much for even a barrister-at-law.

'You threaten me, woman?' and snatching in one leap a ruling rod from the table, advanced crying, 'Let your calisthenics come to your aid now!'

'One step more, and you are a dead man,' thundered Sarada throwing out a clenched fist.

dirty atmosphere. I'm off to Madras. And the door banged after her.

'Wait, Sarada, I shall go with you. The Collector hurried out followed by his sister and his nephew, but not before the widow had remarked: 'Has he done anything unusual? Even Sankaran's father had half-a-dozen keeps. Come, Sankara, it's folly that we have left our home at all and come all this way from Palghat.'



'One step more, and you are a dead man,' thundered Sarada throwing out a clenched fist.

'What is this Sundaram?' now roared a voice from without the room and the door was instantly burst open to reveal the anxious faces of Collector Visvanatha Sarma, his sister, her son, my father and the inevitable cook followed, of course, by myself.

Sundaram was taken aback and he hung down his head in shame and confusion.

'Yes, father,' said Sarada, quivering like a leaf, 'not a moment more in this

'Is it true that she saw you here with a woman this afternoon?' I asked Sundaram.

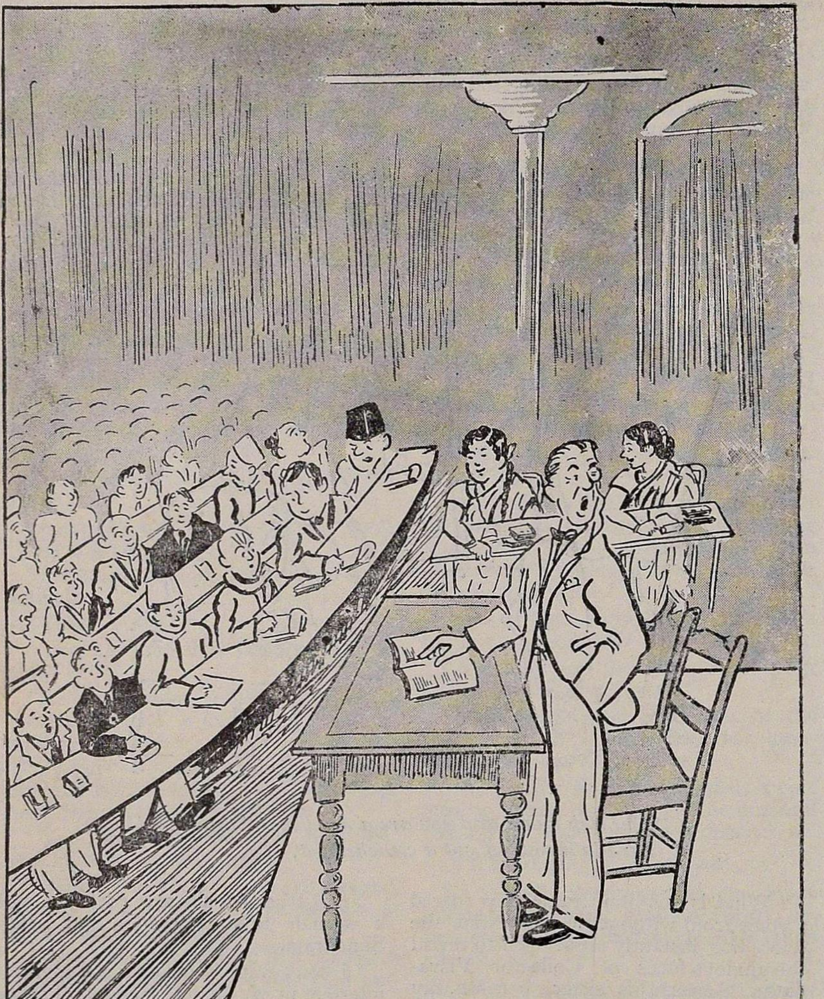
'I don't want idiots and strangers to interfere in my affairs.' Sundaram threw down the ruling rod and vanished.

My father stood speechless.

Subbaroyan Poti picked up the ruler and replaced it on the table.

'A part of it has cracked, I believe,' said I.

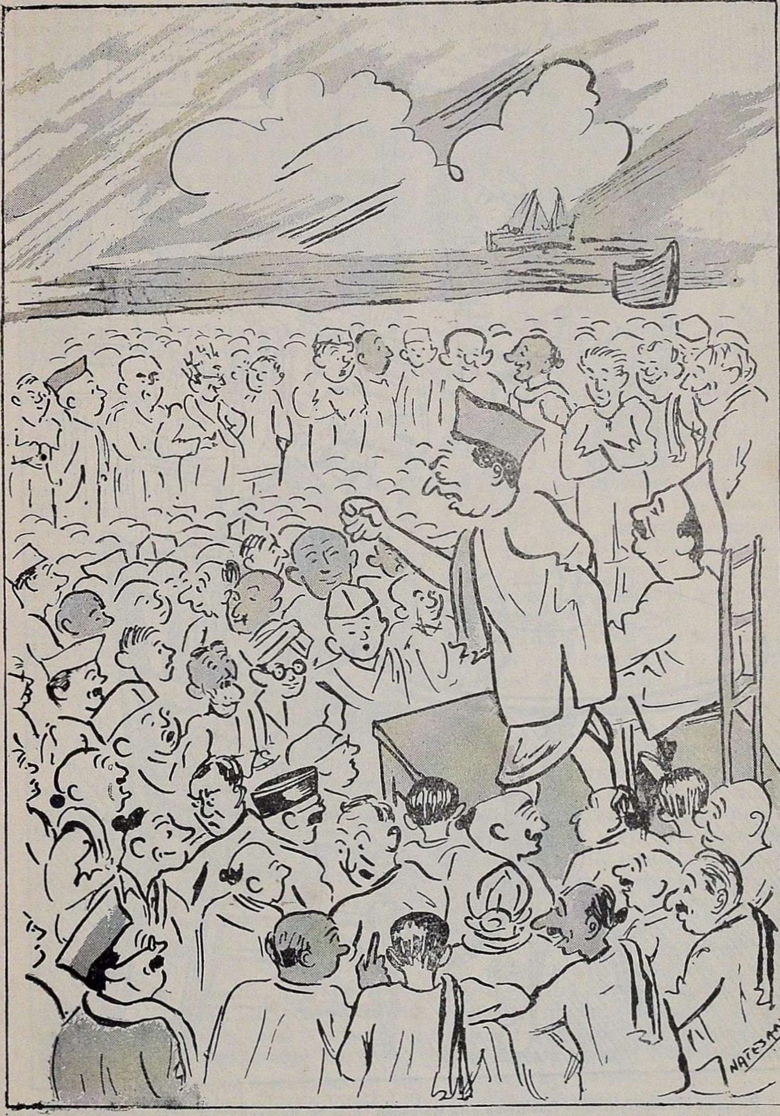
'No, it's broken in two,' and he showed me the two distinct bits.'



Simple N Ramaswamy returns from England as N. Ramsay, B. A. (Oxon). He is Professor in English.—College,—M ; he is lecturing on Poetry : "*As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again*," 'Exquisite ! Exquisite ! gentlemen, and who is there that has not been charmed by this most poetical, most magical line ?'

A voice from the Gallery : 'J. C. Bose !'

[Retrenchment prevents the Professor from making further discoveries of ' most poetical lines.']



Rashtriya Ramadas, *alias* N. Ramaswamy, B.A. (Oxon), *alias* N. Ramaswamy—(in the role of a patriot and like a flaming fountain): 'The Congress expects every Indian to do his duty . . . . For East is East and . . . .

Interruption from the Crowd: 'Stop kipling and talk sense.'

[India's Man of Destiny purges the Congress of its dross].

Romesh Kauntinyo, *alias* Rashtriya vira Ramadas, *alias* N. Ramsay, B.A. (Oxon), *alias* N Ramaswamy—(in the role of a mystic poet): 'The sambar in this little dish floods and o'erflows like the primeval waters and the bonda buoying thereon is the golden egg out of which this universe burst to view. O, the keen call of the Flute, the Great Beyond! I hear a voiceless voice, I behold a lambent mystery.'

THE GAMBLE

By MANNAR KADAMBY

IT was late in the evening an d he sat languidly, looking at the busy street through the window. He seemed to notice nothing of the noisy train of vehicles and men. Even when his friend Sundaram separated himself from the crowd and entered the house, he neither moved nor showed any signs of recognition. The new comer burst into the room unceremoniously and clapping his friend on the back, cried out, ' Well, Hari, what are you doing—lotus eating ?'

Harinath looked at the crumpled paper in his hand before replying. ' You seem to be jolly, anyway,' he said, a little coldly and probably annoyed at the unexpected instrusion.

' Oh, that I am. I have brought great news, my boy, and I thought you would be glad to see me.'

' And what is the great news ?' Harinath asked in a sarcastic tone. ' I suppose your favourite Janet Gaynor has come to Globe, has she ?'

' What is the matter, Hari ?' His voice softened. ' I am inclined to think that something has happened.'

' Yes, it is serious. I must start bricklaying to earn my living. The article I sent to the *Times* has come back.' He threw the crumpled manuscript to him.

' It is disappointing,' Sundaram accepted,' but you should'nt lose yourself on that account. ' You haven't read the papers ?' he added inconsequently. ' No ? Well, I came to tell you that miss Ratna is now a celebrity and——'

Harinath suddenly turned and faced his friend. Haven't I asked you not to talk to me about her ? And it is no news to me either, she was famous last year.'

' But she has made a sensation in the art world,' he rejoined unmindful of his friend's deprecation, 'with The Gamble. The greatest of our artists are claiming her to their midst. If you had only seen the evening papers with those big head lines, you would have realised what a splendid chance is awaiting you. Listen, my boy, do gain an interview with her. Get her to talk her views on matrimony and your article is the foremost to appear. Her conception of matrimony must be wonderful to give us The Gamble. Hari, you must meet her.'

Harinath jumped up to his feet. ' Meet her ? I see. Please Sundaram, why don't you leave me alone. You, who know my relationships with her—you suggest that I should meet her. I think you are anything but friendly, my man.'

' Yes, I do want you to meet her,' came the reply in even tones. ' Think what a glorious chance you have. It is because I know your relationships with her that I ask you to meet her—well, don't look so surprised. I am perfectly reasonable. Is it wise to sacrifice your prospects for the sake of some silly sentimentality. No man can marry all the girls that are offered to him, unless,' he added with a smile, ' he wishes to be a Turk. I see nothing wrong in your refusal.'

' I wish it was a mere proposal,' Harinath murmured bitterly. ' Even then, I am the offender. I made her father propose, encouraging him in so many indirect ways and then refused. What a cowardly insult ! Oh, if I could but undo these three years ! I really don't know what happened—a spell came over me—maybe it was my foolishness, maybe it was the tears of my sick mother. Any how, I changed my mind and married my wife. Only a few days, no, even a few hours after the marriage I realised my blunder. But it was too late to undo the mischief. This marriage is a strange thing.'

' Yes, this marriage is a strange thing and her interpretation of it is stranger,' Sundaram interrupted, unwilling to allow him further. ' Brace up, old boy. We shall first go to Mayo Hall to look

at her work and then you shall see her, the very first thing in the morning. I seem to have gathered more information than you, an aspiring journalist. Three papers sent their representatives, but she refused to see any one of them. Of course, she will see you.'

'How do you know?' came the question almost involuntarily.

'Take it from me; she will surely see you. Now, dress up and we shall go to Mayo Hall.'

Harinath got up saying, 'There is no objection to see her work—no, I am anxious to see it, especially when you say that it shows her interpretation of marriage.'

Three hours later Harinath returned, alone and deeply thoughtful. There was no light in the room, nor did he care to switch the light on. He had seen the wonderful picture which was an envy to many artists. He read the painting as easily as he read his own thoughts. Everything was clean. Old memories came and smote him. He had promised his friend that he would see her. Yes, he would certainly see her but not for the papers. Now, he felt a strong personal desire to meet her, to pour out all his thoughts and unburden himself. He sat still for a while and then lit a cigarette. The room was dark and when he took a deep pull, the smouldering end brightened to reveal a faint outline of the furniture. Once his eyes caught at the reflected scarlet glow in the polished surface of a lock. He took a final long pull and threw away the cigarette. Switching on the light, he opened the trunk and took out a bundle of letters bound by a blue ribbon. He paused for the full space of a minute and unfastened a letter. 'Seventh of July, twenty-nine,' he mused to himself, 'if it could be only the present and not a past. Only three years and what a rise for her!' He took letter by letter, some he read and some he tossed aside. The room kept its silence but for the occasional dry crunches of the papers. 'That is her last,' he said aloud picking up a stout envelope. Presently he started and read slowly in a dreamy way: "Love is a crazy thing. We gamble with it and more often we lose than gain. This marriage altar is the biggest and the most uncertain Casino. And what risks we run!—Why, we even court them cheerfully. It is the funeral of love, a tawdry but none the less lugubrious ritual. Is it not high time that we should have put an end to these masquerades? . . ."

'Yes we gamble with it and more often we lose than gain,' he repeated to himself. 'I have gambled and lost miserably.'

The next morning Harinath found himself in the stately hall of one of the biggest mansions of Bangalore and asked the man who answered his call, 'Is Miss Ratna at home?'

'No, Sir. She cannot see anybody,—she is busy in the studio.'

'But I have got to see her,' he said giving his card. 'Take it to her, I am sure she will see me. You needn't hesitate, I am no pressman.'

After the space of ten minutes, the man returned and Harinath knew by his face that he was to be shown in. He entered a large and artistically furnished room. A mild scent of jasmine bung in the air. He wandered his eyes and saw no one. In front of him, the dark polished surface of a round table reflected an elegant flower vase bearing white blossoms. The morning sun filtered through the coloured window-blinds, suffused the jasmines, as it were, to a faint blue. The other end of the room showed a rich curtained door-way; directly above it an old master. The heavy curtain moved and he deliberately looked away, knowing what it meant. A breath of sweet perfume overpowered the jasmine. He felt rather than saw a figure float into the room. Neither of them spoke. It was an awkward silence. Ratna was the first to break it.

'Won't you please sit down,' she said in perfect English. 'I am very sorry I made you wait.'

He faced her. She was seated at the end of the sofa, her hands clasping her knee, a perfect picture in that dark

brown saree fringed with gold. At last he found his voice.

'You have altered, Miss Ratna. But for your eyes and lips it would have been difficult for me to know you.'

'Altered, have I? Three years is a long time and many things happen.'

'Yes, many things happen,' he hastily rejoined, thankful that the subject came up so easily. 'I came to explain myself, Miss Ratna. Ever since I broke my promise, it has been miserable. You have climbed to a high pedestal—no, please don't stop me—I want to tell you everything. Not that I am jealous but it has made our meeting difficult—even impossible. You know my mother and her ideas. She kept on telling me, always in tears, that you were too grown up and modern to be her son's wife. There was something more that is unpleasant but I never heeded her. You can understand how a man feels when his old mother, the only relative in the entire world, is always in tears. I had my ambitions. I once thought of becoming an author,' he bit his lips and went on, 'I grew worried. One day I yielded thinking that I was making some big sacrifice. And before I could reason out anything, I had promised. Only a few hours after the marriage I realised the value of first love. If I had only known the extent of the sacrifice I was making!' He sank to his seat as if exhausted.

A brief silence followed and at the end a soothing dulcet voice spoke:

'Is it necessary to go through it all, now? I took to my brush only to escape the old memories. About the luxuries you see here—well, I have always liked them and I have often told you so in our happy college days. Sometimes these help me to forget the past. You didn't expect me to renounce everything, as we read in books, did you? Of course, I understand how you feel but—'

'I am afraid, you don't,' he added bitterly, 'you have your art and fame to think about. Perhaps, it is for the best that we didn't marry. You wouldn't have become so famous.'

Miss Ratna fitted her dainty foot to one of the patterns of the carpet. 'I wonder whether I am the gainer with all these,' she said more to herself than to him.

'I do not quite make out what you mean. Anyway, may I tell you that your new picture, The Gamble brought me here. I entirely agree with you: it is nothing but a gamble.'

'With this difference,' she said with a gentle uplift of her beautiful eyebrows, 'in the regular gamble, if one loses the other must win. But here, if one loses the other also loses. We have either two winners or no winner at all. Well, how do you like that—there?' she added with apparent light-heartedness and walked up to the pictures above the doorway. She was quietly watching it for sometime when she became conscious of his presence beside her. "Marvellous!' she exclaimed. 'I have yet to see a more beautiful sunset, how lovely!"

'How lovely!' he echoed.

She turned round suddenly and to escape the embarrasment caused by his propinquity asked in one breath, 'How is your wife?'

Now, this thing which we call human mind is such a conglomeration of contradictory perplexities, that just when his wife was mentioned close to his ear, he forgot her entirely. And before he knew what happened, he had caught her in his arms and kissed her. She effected a gentle release and slowly made away to the exit. He was afraid to face her eyes, he felt them full of reproach. A moment later she would be outside the room, and then it would be too late. He gathered all his strength and said, 'Please, Ratna, stop a minute. I was not myself when I did it. I was mad—intoxicated. Won't you please say that you have forgiven me?' The hitherto assumed reserve vanished from his voice; it was tender and loving as in the days of old.

She did not turn round lest he should see her tears. Both her hands held fast the folds of the fabric and her head rested on her left arm. 'There is nothing to ask forgiveness, Hari,' she said in a tremulous tone. 'Your marriage is a

sad mistake which can't be undone. But nothing prevents us from being friends. It might look outrageous to your mother but heaven knows that I am true to one man and that is you. Well, you told me that The Gamble brought you here. Now I have known from you that your marriage was an accident and you have not ceased to love me. I hold it the highest reward for my work.' A brief pause and she continued in a steadier tone, 'Please wait, Hari. I shall order my car for you. Good-bye.'

The curtain parted and closed quickly and she disappeared, her light footsteps muffled to nothingness by the heavy folds. 'Her highest reward,' he murmured scarcely above a whisper, 'and mine too. But do I deserve it ?'

Some minutes later, a tap came at the door. He started as from a heavy dream. A man entered and bowed. 'The car is waiting, Sir.'

Harinath followed him, puzzled but happy.

The fairies break their dances
And leave the printed lawn,
And up from India glances
The silver sail of dawn.

The candles burn their sockets,
The blinds let through the day,
The young man feels his pockets
And wonders what's to pay.

A. E. HOUSMAN
(*Last Poems*)

COFFEE & KOLA

By S. RAJAGOPALAN

KOTUR founded a society of those who held perpetual allegiance to the Trimurtis. And chief among them was Ramanatha Sastri, the honest brahmin. He had special qualifications in virtue of which he was recognised as the king of brahmins *de facto*. He had attended sixty-two *abhishekams* of Ekambara. He had performed seven funerals. He had been present at three marriages. He had reared five sons and seven daughters. He wore nine sacred threads. He had an imposing paunch.

He was sitting in the kitchen with Ambika, his wife, assisting her in cooking. Now and then Ambika touched on a family topic. She sneered at the monotony of Kotur life. She urged her husband to go hand in hand with time. She laughed his religious scruples to scorn. She dreamed of Madras, electric lights, motor-cars, bazaars, and the many other urban delights.

Sastri retired to a pial with philosophic resignation. There his friend met him.

'Have you not a nephew?' asked Krishna Iyer.

'You mean Advocate Ramalingam?' asked our Sastri.

'Yes. His sister-in-law is going to be married,' said Krishna Iyer.

Sastri knit his brows. 'How is it I have received no invitation?'

'Do you know the date?'

Krishna Iyer smiled. 'What! Sastri, aren't you in touch with the Panchangam? Certainly, this is the marriage-week.'

Krishna Iyer was in a hurry and so declined to take his dinner with Sastri—an exceptional case, indeed!

Sastri decided to start for Madras the very next day to attend the marriage of his nephew's sister-in-law. The night preceding that day was one of busy bustle. The mice that celebrated their festivities in the kitchen wondered why there was light all through the night and why they missed the midnight orchestra —Sastri snoring. They concluded that the great animosity between man and mouse had reached a crisis.

*

Kittu and Seshu competed with each other in the imagination of a railway journey. Kittu obstinately maintained that the train " would change its horses twice at least during the journey". The other boy pointed out the mathematical absurdity in saying that there could be only two changes in a journey extending for more than twelve hours.

When Sastri and his family reached the railway station of Kumbakonam, Kittu and Seshu were all rapture. With awe and reverence they watched the mysterious mechanism, the telephone. Sometimes they were stunned on hearing the whistle of an engine, and oftentimes astounded on seeing the green turban of a railway official.

The Trivandrum Express arrived two hours late at Kumbakonam. It was to stop in Egmore only for a few minutes to clear platform No. 3 for the Friday Special. So Sastri took every precaution to get down in Egmore as quickly as possible.

For seven hours the Express thundered on. Kittu got hungry. Seshu got hungry. Ambika got hungry. The girls were no exception.

'What, my dear, hunger is a monster!' said Sastri.

'Oh! I know that,' said Ambika triumphantly, and opened a big bundle and revealed a miniature " Bakshna Bavan ".

'Women are by nature prudent,' observed Sastri and proceeded to the gratification of his palate. His eyes now happened to fall on a small station

which the train passed by with wanton haughtiness.

' We will reach there in a few minutes. Ready, tie up the bundles, take up the tickets, lock up the trunk—go to the door.' Sastri was all excitement and alertness.

The train had entered the grand Egmore Station. But the bundles . . .

' Quick, else we are lost,' he cried.

But it was no easy task to manage big bundles.

' Quick, wretched devil !' he shouted to his wife.

Women are prudent creatures and also wretched devils. Ambika stood stunned. Sastri came to her help.

' Now I say, you get down with the children. I shall manage the bundles.'

The train, like time and tide, waits for no man ; no, not even for a Brahmin. The Express was to reach the Beach Station before the arrival of the Friday Special. Add to all, Sastri had forgotten where he kept his tickets. He was confronted with the doubt whether the tickets were in his trunk, or on his wife, or even on him or lost for ever. At any moment a green turban might appear. The train whistled.

The old Sastri stood near the door with the infernal bundle on his head that he might leap down. But the fiery monster had gathered speed and was hooting through the outskirts of the city.

' Ah ! mischief of Kali,' he cried and swooned down on a seat.

Ambika would not shed tears, idle tears. She explained her case to the railway authorities. A very amiable lady took pity on her and gave her every assistance. The kind stranger was none other than Kamala who had lost one husband at Kotur and gained another in Madras. And in those days Ambika led a crusade against this self-same Kamala. The antagonists thus brought together after a long time forgot their past. Ambika unfolded her pathetic tale. Kamala sent a telegram to the Beach Station requesting the stationmaster to direct Ramanatha Sastri to 11, Town Street, where he would be restored to his family.

Ambika and her children soon found themselves in a neat little house in Town Street. Kittu was busying his brain as to the function of the electric-fan while the aesthetically inclined Seshu concluded that it was a kind of ornament.

' Oh, you are tired,' said Kamala and fleeted into a room near by.

She came back carrying a big vessel which was steaming.

' You haven't any objection to taking coffee, I suppose,' she said suavely.

' Coffee ! What ! Coffee ! ' Ambika murmured, getting pale. Even the juvenile group got frightened and imposed on themselves a semblance of gravity. Ambika turned on all sides and steadily kept her eyes on the steaming liquid.

' Of course,' she said slowly, ' young people may drink coffee.' Upon which, Kittu proceeded to unequivocally demonstrate the validity of his mother's proposition.

He tasted one cup, and then two cups, and yet stretched out his cup.

' How is the wretched thing ?' Ambika asked her sons who nodded in enthusiastic appreciation.

' Away with your silly objections, my friend,' Kamala sang the song of persuasion.

' After all it is only a vegetable,' said Ambika.

' Certainly, there you are,' said Kamala. The steaming liquid exhaled its flavour. It was a trying moment.

' The coffee is getting cold,' said Kamala.

' All right, Kamala, pour it in that cup, but mind, only a drop ?'

Kamala knew how to interpret that modest quantity. Ambika raised the cup to her lips and before the liquid had half gone through her gullet there was a loud knock on the door. Precipitately she put down the cup. The door was opened and Ramanatha Sastri appeared with a big bundle on his head. In a second he had taken in the situation. He had detected Ambika's crime.

'Shame! Shame! Foul wretch! You have ruined my religion!' he cried and measured his length on the ground unable to bear the ignominy. The rather heavy impact, burdened as he was with his belly and the bundle, threw him into a swoon.

'Kamala,' said Ambika sadly, 'what are we to do now?'

Kamala at once sent out a servant giving him some secret instructions. He returned with a glass of kola and ice. The cool beverage was slowly poured into Sastri's mouth. He recovered consciousness and looked around with a stupid smile, smacking his lips.

'Is that coffee?' he asked, referring to the drink he had taken just then. The impish Kamala replied at once.

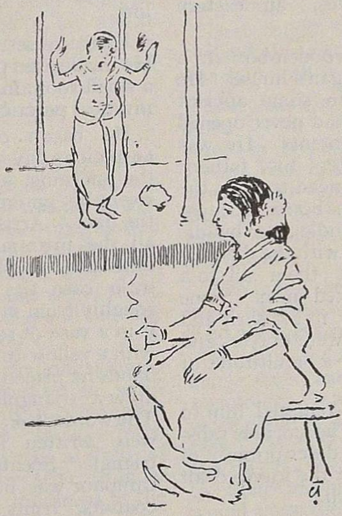
'It is kola and ice.'

Sastri was horror-stricken. 'Is that flesh?' he asked.

But he consoled himself by quoting a probably imaginary passage from the Vedas: 'A brahmin may kill even a cow if it happened to attack him—in other words, a brahmin may even drink kola and ice if necessity demanded it.'

My friend narrated to me these incidents connected with the life of Ramanatha Sastri during one of those pleasant days we spent in Kotur, when I put him the question: 'Can you trace the origin of drink-habits in such an obscure place as Kotur?'

It was impressive indeed when very much in the vein of an orator he concluded: 'You were also puzzled when you saw a possessed woman. Of course she was Ambika. You began to complain of the inadequate attention of psychic researchers to cases of possession. There is no perplexing psychology in this after all. Ambika pretended to be possessed by devils of all degree. Guess, what for? Only for a cup of coffee. Then the devils will take to flight. Sastri used to fall into digestive troubles and a glass of kola alone will cure him. But when caught in the act of drinking his favourite kola, he would quote Vedic passages *ex tempore* as an excuse for his laxity. Sastri and Ambika were pioneers in this line. And succeeding generations have followed suit.'



'Shame! Shame! Foul wretch! You have ruined my religion,' he cried.

FANTASY

By M. R. M. SUNDARAM

RANGAN came to know of Mohini suddenly, in the prime of his youth. She was not a woman of flesh and blood. She was the creation of Rangan's fancy, a creature with super-human attributes, an eastern Clarimonde.

There was a large wooden-box in a dusty corner of Rangan's house. He had known it to contain some ancient manuscripts, but he had never opened it and examined the contents. He was so uninquisitive. After his father's death, however, he chanced to open the box, for want of some better occupation. He shifted out bundle after bundle of palm-leaves covered with the dust of decades, and brought them all to a lighted place to be looked into. Some of them were classics in Sanskrit and some in Tamil; others were prayers and hymns consecrated to a multitude of deities.

Only one manuscript tempted him to peruse it thoroughly. The curious talismans, mystic-charts, descriptions of spirits and demons that the leaves dealt with attracted him much.

One entire chapter was devoted to a sketch of Mohini. 'The enchantress, known by the name of Mohini, hath the beauty of a maddening nature, the same beauty being imperishable. Her flesh hath a fragrance of its own, and the sound of her breathing poureth out soul-stirring music. She doth bestow on her successful wooer the gift of immortality and eternal wealth.' After this came the rites and ceremonies that were stepping stones to the attainment of Mohini's favour.

Rangan studied this particular chapter very carefully. He tried to understand each word and letter of the technic.

There was no one else in his house, except his old sister, who was but a living shadow. The ancient house, with its many dark and ruined rooms, and with this living shadow moving under its ceiling, was in itself enough to make any man incline towards the shadowy and vague side of life.

Rangan set to work immediately. He made due preparations and cleared a small room in the second floor for his mystical practices.

He began on a Friday, the most auspicious day of the week. Early in the morning, after taking a bath in the river, he entered his room and bolted the door. Arranged on the floor were all the materials required. He seated himself on the floor and took from a little case the figure of a woman cut roughly from sandal-wood. He dipped it in a vase of rose water and dressed it with a yellow-tinted cloth. With nervous hands he placed it close to the wall and drew a triangular chart in front of it. The words "*Im, Hreem, Kleem, Mohini,*" were written in the middle of the triangle. Scented sticks were lit and camphor was burnt. Offerings of cocoanuts, fruits, flowers, and choice sweets were lavished before the idol. Rangan counted out exactly one hundred and eight flowers and placed them one by one at the feet of the idol, each at the end of a long and sonorous chant. Finally he stood up, closed his eyes for a moment, murmured unintelligible words and prostrated on the ground thrice.

These practices went on daily for a period of forty-one days. On the last day, he wrapped the idol in silk and carried it to a solitary spot near the river. Facing east, he said something thrice, and threw his burden into the river. The idol sank, emerged into view, aud floated down the waters and out of sight. Rangan raised his voice a little and said, ' I have sent the messenger. Come thou to me, O Mohini, come

with the fragrance of thy flesh, with the music of thy breath !'

He was sure his prayers would be heard. This belief took firm root in him. He became self-hypnotised by his own belief and his senses crystallised into shapes whatever his mind imagined. To him the real world did not exist. He failed to distinguish between fancy and truth. He wandered along the banks of the river at dead of night, when the whole village slept, lay awake in mango-groves when crickets were chirping and owls were screeching, and walked along the country road at a time when none would dare to move about.

Once when he was passing by a tank in the dimness of twilight he smelt a strong fragrance. There was no flowering-tree near by. His imagination played the trick. But he knew it not. He looked about surprised, with wide eyes and wide nostrils and stood transfixed till the twilight faded and the sky became studded with stars.

Another day he was walking along a country road. Night had set in without his being aware of it. No stars were visible in the sky. It was pitch dark. Suddenly there was a flash of lightning; and thunder after thunder roused its echo from the deeps of the earth. But still Rangan walked on. He did not see, he did not hear, the wild drama staged by nature. Leaves fell on him, child winds blew, broken twigs scathed his cheeks without his feeling them.

Suddenly he stopped and pricked his ears. He heard a clear sound of music. It was heavenly, unheard of before. He felt in his heart all the raptures of youth, love, and passion.

Before him was a brilliant glow, green in colour. He walked towards it. A curtain was waving before his face. He lifted it and passed beyond it to feel a velvety surface beneath his feet. There was a cot spread all over with flowers of every colour and shape. The light proceeded from a lamp with five wicks held by a golden-image in its hands. Music throbbed from an unknown source and from somewhere came the sound of anklet-bells. 'This is surely the apartment of Mohini,' said he to himself. He made up his mind to wait for her. He sat on the cot and stamped his foot in impatience. All of a sudden the golden-image, the curtain, the cot, everything vanished and Rangan felt the rain pelting at him with stone-like drops. He found himself sitting in a miry pool.

That night Rangan came home covered all over with mud. His body was sore with wounds.

Many adventures of this kind were in store for him. His vagaries came to be known to the villagers. If any one came to talk to him, he would sadly smile and turn away his face. Even his sister, the living shadow, began to notice him and check his activities.

The living shadow could not live for ever. She passed away. Rangan did not shed a single tear on his bereavement.

He remained shut inside his house for many days and none knew what he was doing. Only at nights, his pathetic voice could be heard through the darkness. 'Mohini, don't you come to me ?' Hearing his cry children would cling to their mothers, and mild natures would press their moist eyes.

One day he came out of his seclusion and again began following the lead of his wild fancy. His body had grown very lean; his eyes glowed like brilliant jewels. In the evening he was seen standing on the top of a rock in the middle of the river.

That night the usual cry did not proceed from his house. Days, nights passed. Rangan could not be found. The villagers searched for him every where, but there was no trace of him. For some time Rangan was on everybody's lips. Soon the excitement died down and his name was forgotten.

On the terrace of Rangan's house a solitary ring-dove alights every day and trills out its sad note. It reminds me of Rangan's own cry and its unfathomable depth of pathos.

ALL FOR A FLOWER

By A. ANJANEYULU

THE sub-collector was a good man, the people said. He had an understanding heart. In his bungalow he kept burning an undying lamp; he fed it with the fragrant oil of sympathy and loving kindness.

But his wife understood herself pre-eminently. She came of a family that refused to talk of its pedigree; before she was ushered into this world her father was a landed aristocrat. She had a sort of raw beauty and it was this that drew the sub-collector to marry her. With this raw beauty went a raw mind which showed a morbid delight in possession, delight which is only another word for greed in one who was the wife of a big officer salaried four figures a month.

The sub-collector allowed his wife to have her own way. He found peace in this policy, leisure to store the fragrant oil for his lamp of idealism. But of late his wife was showing threatening signs to blow it out. He however kept an unruffled mind; on earth a flickering lamp, in heaven a dancing star, he said consolingly to himself.

*

The sub-collector was on the move for *jamabandi* work in the Taluq offices under his control. He preferred travelling in a country-cart enjoying the rustic scenes to speeding in a high grade automobile.

It was a sultry summer afternoon. The pair of cart-bulls was of the best breed, high-humped and fleet-legged; the bed inside the cart was soft and invited slumber. The sub-collector dozed. His wife sitting near the edge watched with interest the trees and paddy-fields receding slowly in the haze of the heat.

Now lost in a hollow, now rounding a bend in the road the cart rumbled on when suddenly the lady who happened to see a beautiful lotus-like flower swinging like the hood of a cobra in the air on the top of a palmyrah, called to the driver to stop. The driver pulled up the nose-strings, turned his face about, and saw the *doraisani* peering out into the dusty haze.

'Why, mother?' he asked in a low respectul tone. The bulls were chafing at the restraint of the strings.

She did not reply, she kept on gazing out.

'Why, mother?' he asked again.

There was no answer.

The peon who was following came running up meanwhile, panting and perspiring. He lifted his eyes to where the *doraisani* was looking so intently and divined in a moment what she wanted. He coughed apologetically, and in a low voice drew her ladyship's attention to the huge overgrowth of prickly-pear about the palmyrah, which defied any one getting to its foot.

Her ladyship would not hear any such thing. She wanted the flower, she *must* have it.

The driver's arms came very near slipping out of their sockets, he had to pull up the strings so hard.

Presently a yenadi and his wife came up with fishing rods and baskets. The baskets smelt fish but did not look full. The pair passed by, conversing in low yenadi accents, and every now and then raising up the baskets and smiling into them.

The peon felt a load off his shoulders. He called to them to stop, once, twice; but they had passed out of hearing. He believed fanatically in the *dorai's* omnipotence and consequently in his own authority. How could the idea then enter his mind that his master and he might be disobeyed? He thought he had not been heard. And with a parched throat he shouted.

The slumbering sub-collector woke yawning and rubbing his eyes. The peon bowed to him awkwardly, ran up to the yenadis, and at the distance was seen talking to them, gesturing agitatedly. He often raised his hand pointing to something on high, then levelled it down towards the cart. When the uncontrollable bulls trotted up to them, the peon was heard to say: 'You fellow, climb that tree and get the flower. The *doraisani* wants it.'

The yenadi with his wife struck off into a footpath, mumbling: 'All are *dorais*, all are *doraisanis*; not one gives a morsel to bite.'

The drowsy sub-collector seemed not to catch the drift of it all, he nodded into sleep again.

The police orderly, who lagged behind to fleece the petty shopkeepers on the way, came up presently and asked the peon why the cart stopped; was there any trouble? There was a minute's whispering and glancing at the *doraisani*.

The police orderly then ran a few yards ahead and in a commanding tone called to the yenadis to turn round and not to move. The woman who was trudging behind her man heard it first, looked back and saw the orderly standing in all his police majesty, his right hand crooked at the waist and the left busy twisting the moustache. The command was repeated and the woman trembled.

'*Mama**', she stammered, 'police! police!' The man swung back on his heels, saw the orderly and shuddered. Both man and wife came running towards him, bowed their heads to the dust and waited respectfully for orders.

'You ass,' cried the orderly to the quaking yenadi, 'you can't hear me, hey? Get up that palmyrah and pluck the flower from the top there. The *doraisani* wants it. Get up, quick.'

The poor yenadi and his wife perspired mortally, placed the fishing rods and baskets down, and hurriedly rounded the prickly-pear many times to see if there was a way to the foot of the tree.

The sub-collector who had again been disturbed in his slumber heard and saw all and sat wondering at the inverted positions he and the police orderly occupied in the yenadi's mental world. Her ladyship's face beamed.

The yenadi woman was at last seen standing on the edge of the thorny overgrowth and the man elbowing his way cautiously through it.

Fifteen minutes passed, fifteen breathless minutes. The yenadi was seen on the top of the palm, his left hand encircling the trunk and his right catching hold of the saw-edged stem of a leaf. He was next seen shaking and leaving off his clutch about the tree; a little cloud of wasps had obscured him for a while. The woman was heard to shriek out, '*mama*, hold fast, hold fast. Be careful, *mama*.'

'Why do you shout there,' thundered the orderly.

The yenadi had disappeared in the crown of thorny leaves. The flower with a cubit-long stem came down spinning through the air and was caught deftly by the woman.

'Run up with it,' cried the orderly.

She came, her bosom heaving and falling with excitement, and presented the flower to the *doraisani* with a low bow. The next instant she was back again near the prickly pear.

The chaffing bulls broke off.

The *doraisani* gazed at the flower for a time with wide-eyed admiration. She then parted the stem and with all grace and satisfaction stuck the flower to her knot of hair. She then drew her sari over her shoulders, wiped her face with

*'Mama' means 'uncle.' It is almost a rule among certain castes and tribes in South India for a girl to marry her mother's brother. Even after the marriage she continues to address her husband as 'uncle.' By use husbands who are not uncles are also addressed as uncles.

a towel and before an imaginary mirror smiled at her beauty.

It was evening. The sub-collector after inspecting the Taluq office went to the tennis court attached to the local club and had three hearty sets. It was a village growing into a little town, with but four or five tennis players, and every one absent was badly missed. But the doctor's delay could be easily explained, he must have had an urgent case.

Six...six fifteen...six thirty. The little club waited for the doctor. Instead, the hospital servant came with a note in which the doctor requested his friends to come to him to look into a serious case he had on hand.

The party hastened to the hospital. The sub-collector was the most eager of all to render aid. Imagine his dismay then when he found the yenadi woman whom he had met earlier in the day while travelling, wringing her hands and shedding agonising tears and calling on every one present to save her man!

The yenadi was pinned over every inch of his body with sharp little thorns. They were pulled out, the sub-collector helping, and some ointment was daubed over the wounds to allay the pain. One eye was found to be irreparably damaged. When the poor fellow came to his senses, he yelled with pain but through the pain struggled to say, 'Did the *doraisani* wear the flower, pray, did she?'

The woman beat her breasts and wailed aloud.

Her agonising cry stabbed the sub-collector's heart. The incident of the flower came back to his mind with an excruciating ache—in all its vivid details. And he wondered how the wretched woman had managed to bear her unconscious husband to the hospital.

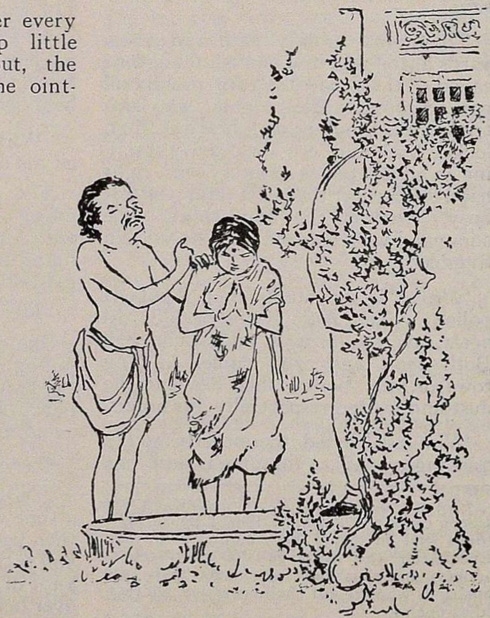
He thought of his wife and a deep bitterness welled up in him. He cursed fate for giving him a woman who had no human feelings. But she had grown an unriddable habit with him and he found a certain painful pleasure in her company. He craved for it and he lived in it.

He hastened to his bungalow, thrust a fifty-rupee note into the orderly's hand, mumbled brief instructions and set off to headquarters that very hour.

A month had passed when one day the police orderly brought the yenadi from the hospital before the sub-collector.

The yenadi woman who accompanied, fell prostrate at the *dorai's* feet.

The sub-collector rose from his chair and through his prince-nez looked long and steadily at the yenadi. A pair of lightless eyes met his gaze and there came a quiet cry which pierced his heart, 'Did the *doraisani* wear the flower, pray, did she?'



'Did the doraisani wear the flower, pray, did she?'

THE LIVING DEATH

By SCHWARTZ PON RATNAM

I CAN assure you, my readers, that, in spite of the words of my dear wife, Rukmani, who says that I do not know the difference between the past and the present, between yesterday and to-day, I can recollect the past. Yes, it is true that, when alone, I can well recall the far-flung caprice and vigour of those days when my blood was young (Rukmani, my girl, where were you then ?), and when the event which I here record befell me.

When I was twenty years of age (forty years have rolled away since then), I was a studious youth, working hard, in the final year of the School Course, for the Government Examination, that stern and cold master who even then was musing on his approaching felling of the young trees that did not bear sufficient fruit. Students were whispering to one another that the Matriculation examination was the only " fellow" to get over—that the subsequent Arts Examinations were but weaklings compared with this giant. Indeed, the school examinations seemed nothing to us when compared with the one that now awaited us.

What recollections I have of the joys of schooldays! How frequently do I feel that I would willingly run to school once again: but how frequently am I reminded that such days have long passed!

In those days I was (as I am now) a first-rate " imaginer," and my imaginings coming to live with me, became convictions. I should long ago have turned novelist, but for my dear wife, Rukmani ; she would not have it, fearing, as she did, the strain on my brain, which, she said, would be bad for me, and moreover that I would not find any publisher who would for one moment consider my " foolish prate." However, on the day when this story opens, forty years ago, my imagination was busy with a strange matter—something that was equal to the prophecy of any prophet. My thoughts were, in fact, trying to grasp a theory. Now, everybody has his or her own theory. Darwin, for instance, had a theory by which he connected human beings with monkeys, through a " missing link " that had for ages, and has ever since, been missing: but in my case, only when imagination had passed to conviction, and conviction had developed to experience, did I get my theory. And my theory? Well, it can also be stated as a prophecy, and one, too, that can be predicted straight away in respect of any living soul—and, therefore, dear readers, also of you. Put in the form of a prophecy, it is simply this:

YOU WILL NOT LIVE AFTER YOU ARE DEAD.

I beg that the words be treated as I treat them, as they are—I stress only the material force in them—and so, please, Religious Teachers, do not, with the scriptures in your hands and monocles in your eyes, pull me down and send my theory heavenwards.

To come to my imagination on the day in question—and I must tell you it was a vivid one—I imagined I was a young child threatening a donkey that had trespassed into our field. A sort of " night tramp " it was; but yet, though without foresight in its brain, it could execute such a bold move as to enter our field, materially assisted by a lecture I was listening to, my imagining proceeded apace, and at last my thoughts came to the dream of life. That was interesting. And it is certain that imagination can double, ay, multiply, either pleasure or sorrow. However, so far, my imagining had been wholly of the pleasurable kind. But then came the climax, and that robbed me of my joy. I imagined that I would die that same night—at eleven o'clock. And it became conviction.

When I rose up, at the end of the lecture, I was accosted by one of the

prefects and his party of three gallant stalwarts, who told me that I was a professor of fools and many other things calculated to heat young blood. 'You fools,' I retorted, 'I am your professor, then. I die to-night at eleven, and afterwards, in spirit, I will haunt you and scare you to death.'

'Oh, what wise sayings, Professor!'

I pretended to be affected by their mirthful words, and they at once wore serious expressions.

'Goodness, Professor,' said one, don't say it will come to pass. Things said in joke sometimes happen. Words have action. My God, then I shall weep! So will the whole school.'

'Keep your nerve,' I returned. 'The time for that has not yet come.'

'Here, Annan,' said the familiar voice of a little boy, named Thomas, 'why the care-worn look? Like a baby that has no care, sniff the air—so my book says,' he ended.

'When it bites,' said I, 'the baby will cry.'

'I know that, too,' said Thomas. 'But what's the matter, there's such a distress-complex on your laughter-proof face?'

'My complex itself,' I replied. 'I don't bother tuppence about my laughter-proof face. Better not to be good-looking than to be bad in heart.'

Retort and counter-retort followed, and then, after warning them to beware of me, since they were so trying to get the better of me, I went on:

'What is the use of life? Many humbugs will say, No use. But then, if something of tempting taste be placed before them, they will at once change their tone, like Eve, they will say, 'Life is indeed tasty.' But I am not like that. To night I'm going to die. Try me! Place some sweetmeats before me, and you'll see—I shall tell you they are sour. Everybody's material end is death. Today is my end. Listen, you baby fellows—that my life is at an end is certain. I know it. Yes, I know it. To-night, at 11 P.M., I shall die. And what is the use of this life, that, anyway, will end some day? But let what I have said be a secret, else—'

'Committing suicide?' asked one. And on that, there was a chorus of warnings and implorings—emotional words and gestures.

'Stop that nonsense!' I cried. 'I am going to die. But beware, you fellows! If any one of you let the secret out, I will kill all of you with my knife! For what care I for your lives, when I myself am going to die?'

That night, when I lay myself in bed, I could not sleep, for I was thinking of the strange turn of events as foreshewn by my day-dream. I felt I was breathing in the vacant depths and heights of a different atmosphere; every minute I was wondering what would come next. And gradually I began to represent what I imagined, to be a sudden prophecy which my subconscious mind had suddenly conceived. Thus the minutes crept lightly by.

Suddenly my heart gave a jump of increased fear—I had heard the clock strike 10-30!

The minutes crept past again . . . it must now be nearly eleven. How to describe what I felt—I who sorrowfully believed it all to be real!

The clock struck eleven. I was something more than frightened—gasping for breath, yet living! But, though fear danced within me, though my whole body was cold with fright, yet I died not. For my mind was still active; I was plainly conscious of a struggle between life and death . . . Hark! . . . Had I heard voices that were not human? No! it was but the drifting of a moarning wind.

Now I heard the steps of someone near me, and fearing I knew not what, I uttered not a sound, but lay as though I were dead. But I listened with my whole being, and the sound of muffled steps continuing, I felt forced to open my eyes. A Thing shrouded in white was coming towards me; and it was followed by three others similarly apparelled. The four Things stood around me—with fear, I closed my eyes.

I was gagged by the Beings. I was conscious of being carried by them. I was suspended between heaven and earth.

I realized that I had been carried outdoors, and opening my eyes, I saw the firmament glimmering above me. At that, I tried to extricate myself but the more I tried, the greater was the grip that held me—a grip that hurt.

The four Beings carried me to the northern end of the school compound. Here they removed the gag. Then, suddenly, they released their grip—splash! I had fallen into something that drenched me.

The next moment I realized that I was in the boys' bathing-tub. I laved my face once, twice, thrice to assure myself whether it was all a dream or not—whether I was still on earth or in a spiritual world. Seeing the familiar surroundings, I concluded that, after all, I was not dead; from the water-tub I had risen from the imagined death.

But it was only later that I discovered that I had not been under any spiritual influence, but under the very material influence of the prefect and his three friends, as the result of my words to them that day.

And so I, who imagined death, and, in my feelings, experienced death, still live; still I am alive, happy and kicking. For no immortal hand penned this record, but I, a mortal being, have written it; and that proves my theory true, for had I been dead, I should not have arisen from the bath-tub.

And so my theory stands—*You will not live on earth after you are dead*!

ADAM AND EVE

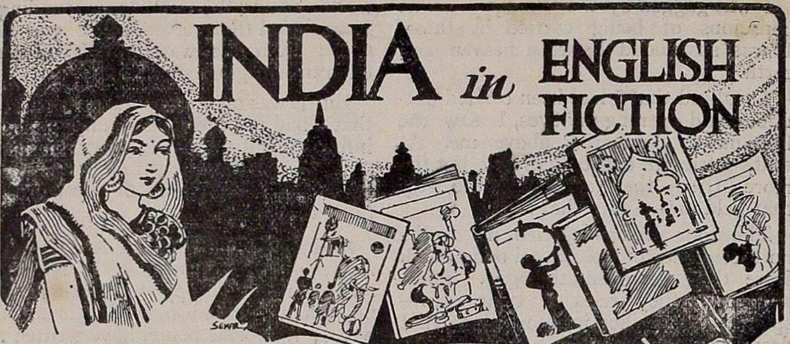
A little boy and a little girl were looking at a picture of Adam and Eve.

'Which is Adam and which is Eve?' said one.

'I do not know,' said the other, 'but I could tell if they had their clothes on.'

DOES MAMMA KNOW?

A father was telling his eldest daughter, aged about six that she had a little sister, and was explaining to her how nice it all was. The child said it was delightful and added, 'Does mamma know? Let us go and tell her.'



INDIA *in* ENGLISH FICTION

In the crowded streets of the colourful city one meets with gentle races of noble lineage, worshipping powerful deities and idols. Beside them are certain fierce tribes of small stature whose superstitions bear witness to their former wild life. Here, in an old house, lives a Hindu scholar and in the yard sits his outcaste sweeper. At the edge of the pavement of a narrow lane one perceives the Mohammedan letter-writer . . . and farther down in modest dwellings live Parsi bank clerks, Jain retail sellers, Mahratta or Gujurati jewellers and other brown and black skinned men and women—all subjects of the British Empire.—Savel Zimand in "Living India".

AMONG Anglo-Indian writers who have known, studied, and regarded with respect the Indian character in every class and rank of society Colonel Philip Meadows Taylor occupies a unique position. The only important authority for his life is his autobiography, published in two volumes under the title, "The Story of My Life," edited by his daughter, Miss A. M. Taylor, and with a preface by his old friend and kinsman Henry Reeve. Meadows Taylor has put the most critical epochs of Indian history in a series of romances, rich alike in picturesque incident and more picturesque life; *The Confessions of a Thug*,* his first novel, which is dedicated to Lord William Cavendish Bentinck and George Lord Auckland who were instrumental in exterminating Thuggee, is the most entertaining of all his fictions; Taylor vouches for the literal truth of the story which he elucidated from the hero of the novel in the course of his official duties.

The Confessions of a Thug is so packed with incidents; its narrative method is so beguiling that it does not allow itself to be put into the nut-shell of a summary. Nora I. Sholto-Douglas has succeeded, however, in retelling it as a short story ("Synopsis of English Fiction" [Harrap]) which Taylor himself would have gladly accepted as an outline for his brilliant novel.

'While travelling toward Indoor, Yoosuf Khan and his wife and son fell in with Ismail, who, with a party, was going in the same direction. At Ismail's instance Yoosuf Khan sent his servants home and committed himself to the protection of his new friends, who took an early opportunity of despatching him and his wife and seizing all their treasure, though their son, having attracted the attention of Ismail was saved and adopted by that pleasant travelling companion.

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* The World's Classics, 2s.

Ismail was a Thug—in other words, a member of a sect flourishing at that time in India, which was a kind of free-masonry of thieves. The members of this secret society were bound to assist one another, recognized one another by signs, mixing freely with the rest of the community, and covering their nefarious means of livelihood under the guise of trades of various kinds.

The word ' Thug ' means ' deceiver,' and refers to their invariable method, which was to make friends with their intended victims, and, watching their opportunity, deftly fling a noose over their heads and strangle them before they had time to cry out. Even Ismail's own wife never knew of her husband's true calling. His adopted son, Ameer Ali, was early initiated into the horrible order. He was severely scolded by Ismail for failing to relish the first murder he had the pleasure of witnessing, when eight travellers were murdered by the band at a concerted signal.

Not long after this he accomplished his own first murder in good style, and was heartily congratulated by Ismail. His second victim was the stalwart servant of a rich merchant, who had been marked down in the usual way. This opportunity gave Ali a stiff fight and managed to stab one of the Thugs to death before being strangled by our hero.

Justly gratified to note his son's prowess, Ismail allowed him to take a dancing girl named Zora on his travels with him. As she had been in the service of the Nuwab, the Thugs were pursued. Their camp was searched, but nothing suspicious was found, and the Nuwab's retainers left apologising for their mistrust. The cunning Ali had taken the precaution of sending his lady love with a suitable guard by another route, and joined her two days later in perfect safety. When she visited her mother, the latter detained her and refused to restore her to Ali. This did not break his heart, as a lovely girl named Azeema had fallen desperately in love with him, and begged him to take her away at once. Nothing loth, Ali acceded to this request and married the fair one. The booty he had amassed in his depradations hitherto was ample to keep the newly-wedded couple for over two years, during which time they lived happily and had two children, a boy and a girl.

Ali resumed his amiable habits as soon as funds got low, and passed his life in a succession of the most horrible and treacherous murders, obtaining enormous quantities of booty. A wealthy widow fell in love with him, and wanted him to take her away. He refused, being a married man and having a tender conscience. The infuriated lady then told him she knew his secret and would inform the authorities that he was a Thug. Of course, this left the poor man no alternative. Much as he disliked the job, he strangled her on the spot, then despatched her slave, and with the help of his gallant companions wiped out her entire company, to the number of about twenty. He could take a joke, of course, but this misguided widow went a little too far.

The Government began to wake up to the necessity of exterminating Thuggee and scouts began to spy out the Thugs. In fear of being caught, and remembering that he had murdered with his own hands many hundreds of unsuspecting travellers, Ali decided to cover his tracks by joining the Pindharees. In this regiment there is no pay, but each man is expected to get as much plunder as he conveniently can.

Attacked by English troops, Ali's band was routed and scattered, but this did not trouble our hero, who got any amount of booty in the villages he passed in his flight. Having collected a little band of worthy companions, he seized an elderly man, killed his wife and sons, and reserved a worse fate for his daughters. When the victim asked for a drink of water the humorists gave him a cupful of his son's blood. He declined it with thanks, but they would not take a refusal. Still full of fun they encouraged him to tell them where his treasures were by tying a bag of hot

ashes to his nostrils and mouth. Strange to say, their little jokes were scarcely appreciated by the venerable gentleman.

Ali went home for a time. His son had died, but he spent a couple of years with his wife and daughter, farming a large territory which he and his father had obtained.

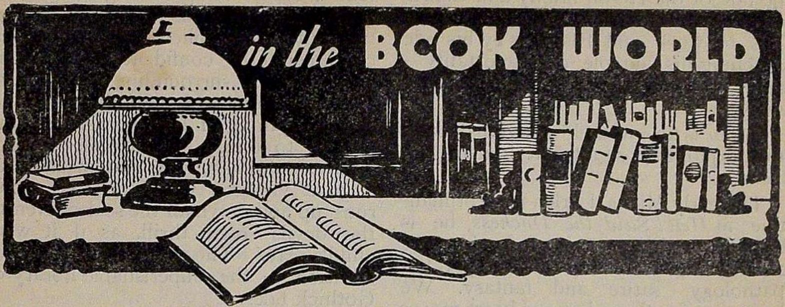
Home life did not suit Ali's temperament, and he went on his travels again. The first day was rather quiet, only fourteen men being murdered. His career was drawing to a close however. Soon Ali and his father were betrayed, and taken before the Rajah. Ismail defying the potentate, he was secured by a chain to the foot of an elephant, which was then pricked with a spear. The enraged animal dashed forward, and, as Ali reverently remarked, his poor father's soul was quickly in Paradise.

Ali was branded on the forehead with hot irons, and expelled from the Rajah's territory, being solemnly informed that should he return his fate would be that of his respected parent. Coming across a traveller, who gave him food, Ali thanked him heartily and murdered him, taking his belongings. Falling in with some brother Thugs, Ali travelled on with them, indulging in their usual mild amusements, but getting over-confident they were taken prisoners and thrown into gaol. Being detected in an attempt to file through his chains, Ali was put into heavier chains and fastened to another captive in a tiny room, where he spent twelve years, his companion dying during that period.

Released at last, Ali could not resist the inclination to go back to his old habits. Once more taken by the forces of the English Government, he saved his skin by turning informer, and was the heroic means of tracking down all his former associates, spending the rest of his life in well-deserved peace.'

People in general, or writers speculating on human actions, form wrong judgments concerning them, because they decide coolly, and at a distance, on what is done in heat and on the spur of the occasion.

William Hazlitt
(*On People of Sense*)



INDO-ENGLISH

Spotted Green, by Schwartz Pon Ratnam (Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 2s. 6d.)

THE 'ghost' of these Indian stories is a printer's error for 'short'; this alone can save the author who has put his idea of ghostliness in the first only of the eight stories in the collection. Mr Pon Ratnam has the talent to tell a good story but his manner is thin and monotonous. He shows a keen eye for details but fails in an effective grouping of them. Of the eighty pages of the volume those that pattern "The Blue Coat" have more colour and better vigour. M. S. K.

ENGLISH

Rosy-Fingered Dawn, by Rose Marie Hodgson (Constable, 7s. 6d.)

Heron, by Romilly Cavan (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

Hell! Said the Duchess, by Michael Arlen (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.)

Seven Gothick Tales, by Isak Dinesen, (Putnam, 7s. 6d.)

Honeymoon & Other Stories, by Malachi Whitaker (Jonathan Cape, 7s. 6d.)

ROSY-FINGERED DAWN is a tale of under-graduate life at Oxford. Though it is written in the manner of Virginia Woolf, it has a quiet originality and Rose Marie Hodgson has (to use her own words) sought 'phrases which I store in the cool places of the memory to mould my own sentences when I am ready to write.' She is a conscious artist; spontaneity, restraint, and a sparkling intellect combine harmoniously when her heroes and heroines soliloquise in the hour they burst into bloom and reveal character. For the first novel of a writer *Rosy-Fingered Dawn* is a little achievement, and things, one hopes would follow it, are sure to enrich and endure.

Equally an achievement and a promise of better things is Romilly Cavan's *Heron*, 'a remarkably mature first novel by a very young writer,' as the publishers say. It is the story of the fortunes of a renowned living poet and his three daughters. Richard Heron, the poet, spell-binds his family with the intense ego of a successful artist; the daughters while they think that united, they are a perfect example of bliss and contentment to the world, are secretly unhappy. They are free to escape the paternal influence but they do not want to. One of the daughters drowns herself when she finds that free, she can't bear any reproachful forbearance; another makes a sudden and rash marriage and in the incompatibility of her husband takes an ironic delight. Elaine the eldest daughter is left alone with her father; her love-affair with a young American has ended unhappily: the lover cannot bear the ideals of an old fool who has the song in him. Into the company of the father and daughter is thrown a beautiful young girl Rosamund—Miss Cavan has very delicately done her character. Rosamund escapes

the fate of the Heron family and makes a successful marriage. The old poet falls to work and Elaine is by his side watching his aureole of immortality—only with her eyes; her heart is far away.

Heron is an intensely individual book and exploits a significant human problem.

The early Michael Arlen is all brilliantine; in *Hell! Said the Duchess*, he is brilliant with a genuine force for pure story telling. Here is murder and psychopathology, satire and fantasy. We have eyes for these, but our heart moves with the superb narrative movement of the story.

Isak Dinesen has a taste for the true Gothick horror and her style unadorned by the horrors and mysteries and fantastic humours of the stories, transfixes the reader with its simplicity, orderliness and leisurely coolness. Lines such as these chosen at random would serve to show it: 'The sun rose at this moment above the horizon, but it did not change or dominate the scene any more than did his arrival. All the others were in some way repressing or disguising their real feelings, whereas he showed his distress with the simplicity of an unspoiled child, perfectly confident of the sympathy of his surroundings. His dark eyes were moist, but frank and gentle, as if everything in life were sweet and natural to him, and he gave the same impression of assurance and mastery as a great virtuoso who on his violin runs up and down all the scales, even to the devils' own thrill, as if it were child's play.' The book is a precious addition to the imperishable library of Gothick tales.

Malachi Whitaker's stories are perfect poetic pieces; they are in the tradition of Tchehov, Coppard, Maupassant, Mansfield. They are impossible of expansion into anything longer; Mrs Whitaker seizes a moment, intense or halcyon, and records them in a shining crystal of permanence. Of the fifteen stories in the collection "Honeymoon," "Eve," "The White Line," and "The Burden of the World" are unforgettable for their completeness and tranquil candescence.

PEREGRINE PICKLE.